

2015

Thomas Johnson: Gentleman, Vermonter, Patriot

Angela Nicole Grove

University of Vermont, angela.grove@gmail.com

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THOMAS JOHNSON:
GENTLEMAN, VERMONT, PATRIOT

A Thesis Presented

by

Angela Grove

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts
Specializing in History

October, 2015

Defense Date: June 8, 2015
Thesis Examination Committee:
Andrew Buchanan, Ph. D, Advisor
Barbara Saylor Rodgers, Ph. D, Chairperson
Jacqueline Carr, Ph. D
Cynthia J. Forehand, Ph. D, Dean of the Graduate College

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a micro-history of the formation of the various identities that shaped the Revolutionary War experiences of one eighteenth-century Vermonter (Thomas Johnson) whose life is documented in a manuscript collection at the Vermont Historical Society. I break down Johnson's identities into three levels: social class, state, and national. My argument is that what it meant to be a provincial gentleman, to be a Vermonter, and to be an American were still being constructed at the time of the Revolution and were therefore in a state of flux. The fluid nature of these identities shows us how America's founding fathers' generation was full of ambiguity and a multiplicity of choices.

The first section of my thesis analyzes how Johnson's identity as a gentleman officer influenced his experience as a prisoner-of-war. I argue that Johnson's identity as an American patriot and his role as a double-agent can only be understood in relation to his conflicted identity as a provincial gentleman. The second section, on the identity of Vermont in the context of a new American nation, starts with historical background on the formation of Vermont first as part of New Hampshire, then as part of New York, and, finally, in negotiations with the British in Canada to rejoin the British empire, with which Johnson participated. In this section I argue that the shifting identities of colonial and revolutionary Vermont provided a backdrop of fluidity and change, as well as animosities between eastern and western residents, which influenced the identities of individual Vermonters during the war, including Thomas Johnson. For the national level, I look at how European Americans had divided loyalties during the war, with an emphasis on the Revolution as a civil war. My thesis departs from most historiography on the Revolution as a civil war, though, by examining it as a war with gray area – not just black and white, or Patriots versus Loyalists. I use this analysis to examine how Johnson's community was divided and why Johnson's neighbors reacted so diversely to the possibility that he was working with the British. In a last and brief section of my thesis, I look at how Johnson has been memorialized in his town's history, and how doubts of his American loyalty have all but disappeared over time, regardless of the intense debates they provoked during his lifetime. I aim to show that despite the consensus view that has shaped much of the historical memory of the American Revolution, the actual process of revolution was full of disorientation and turbulence.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the encouragement, respect, and support of Dr. Andrew Buchanan. While working on my thesis I had the honor of Andy's help not only as my advisor, but also as my teaching-assistantship professor. Thank you for believing in me and giving me the freedom and opportunity to try new things in both areas. I also would have been lost without the background knowledge of colonial and revolutionary America provided by Dr. Jacqueline Carr. Her admirable expertise, wide range, and high standards gave me the context to take on a project of this scope. Other professors who encouraged me along the way include Dr. Dona Brown – who provided insight into aspects of Thomas Johnson's life immediately following the Revolutionary War as well as a plethora of encouragement, Dr. Amani Whitfield – whose course gave me the opportunity to learn about the Newbury community in different and enlightening ways, and Dr. Nicole Phelps – who answered many confusing logistical questions and taught me how to use complicated computer programs that saved me a lot of time and stress in the end. Fellow graduate students Natalie Coffman and Matt Goguen were also stress-savers. Thank you Natalie for the laughs, runs, and support, and thank you Matt for sharing the trips to the Vermont Historical Society archives, contra dances, and diner cuisine.

Outside of the University of Vermont, I am indebted to historical researcher Carl Anderson III for giving me the rare opportunity to chat in depth with someone deeply knowledgeable about the residents of Newbury, VT. Thomas Johnson, his allies, enemies,

and neighbors all came alive in those few hours while Carl and I gossiped about them, our mutual friends.

With the generosity of the University of Vermont History Department's Thompson Summer Research Fellowship I was able to spend over a week in the archives of the Vermont Historical Society, as well as visit Thomas Johnson's hometown of Newbury, VT, the forts in Canada in which Johnson was held as a prisoner, and the battle sights on Mount Independence. The staff at the Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library in Barre, VT were always accommodating, especially Paul Carnahan, who scanned and emailed to me numerous pages of documents as I realized almost too late their significance to the story. I also want to recognize the efforts of the primary source collections that have been digitized, including America's Early Newspapers, American Early Imprints, the Library of Congress's Washington Papers, and the Canadian Heritage Project's Haldimand Papers. Without the ease of access that these digital copies provide, my understanding of Thomas Johnson's life would have been quite biased and incomplete.

My life-during-grad-school would have been a stressful mess without my husband Sam. Without a doubt he should receive at least an honorary BA in history for listening to all my brainstorming and books and papers I read aloud. The last six months of this project also benefitted from the presence of my puppy Patrick, who made working from home so much more enjoyable. And lastly, a big thank you to my mother for instilling in all of her children a fascination with history. All of those summer vacations spent at old forts and Oregon Trail sites were the true start of this project.

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
LIST OF FIGURES	v
INTRODUCTION Thomas Johnson: An Obscure Man.....	1
PROLOGUE Thomas Johnson’s Opportunities from “Indian Troubles”	10
CHAPTER ONE Thomas Johnson: Gentleman	23
CHAPTER TWO Thomas Johnson: Vermonter.....	67
CHAPTER THREE Thomas Johnson: Patriot.....	109
POSTLUDE Thomas Johnson: Memorialized.....	151
BIBLIOGRAPHY	163

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Tombstone of Ruth Johnson.....	13
Figure 2: Tombstones of John Johnson and Katherine Johnson.....	13
Figure 3: The massacre at Fort William Henry	20
Figure 4: Pocket of Abigail Carleton.	29
Figure 5: Thomas Johnson's store records	31
Figure 6: 1769 Map of Newbury's land allotments.....	34
Figure 7: Early photo of Thomas Johnson's 1775 house.....	37
Figure 8: Recent photo of Thomas Johnson's 1775 house.....	38
Figure 9: Bayley-Hazen Road.....	39
Figure 10: Mount Independence	41
Figure 11: Fort Ticonderoga	42
Figure 12: Thomas Johnson's mill stone	46
Figure 13: Thomas Johnson journal.....	51
Figure 14: Thomas Johnson's parole oath.....	63
Figure 15: New Hampshire Royal Governor Benning Wentworth	70
Figure 16: Statue of Ethan Allen	74
Figure 17: Dr. Samuel Adams punished by the Green Mountain Boys.....	75
Figure 18: Thomas Chittenden.....	88
Figure 19: Ira Allen.....	88
Figure 20: British General Frederick Haldimand	89
Figure 21: Captain Justus Sherwood	89

Figure 22: Colonel Barry St. Leger.....	92
Figure 23: Isle Aux Noix	95
Figure 24: Fort Saint John.....	95
Figure 25: Map of the Richelieu River and Lake Champlain	96
Figure 26: General William Heath.....	102
Figure 27: William Franklin	114
Figure 28: The Alternative of Willilams-Burg	117
Figure 29: Revolutionary War loyalty oath	125
Figure 30: Mesheche Weare's 18 th -century house	146
Figure 31: Nathaniel Peabody.....	147
Figure 32: General Washington's Headquarters in Newburgh, New York.....	148
Figure 33: Thomas Johnson's obituary	152
Figure 34: Frances Parkinson Keyes.....	155
Figure 35: Historic plaque for Thomas Johnson.....	160
Figure 36: Historic marker for General Jacob Bayley	161

INTRODUCTION

Thomas Johnson: An Obscure Man

Americans are fascinated with their foundation myths. They have invoked the sacrifices of the original patriots as justification for a variety of political, military, and moral arguments for more than two hundred years. The actions of these patriots have been simplified over time to create a straightforward story of heroes overcoming their British oppressors.¹ In reality, people back then were just as complicated as are people today. When historians look at the lives of common individuals during America's War of Independence, we frequently find that their intentions were as often selfish as they were ideological. No doubt there were many instances of bravery and sacrifice, but the sacrifices of the founding citizens were sometimes only made under duress and begrudgingly; some were completely fabricated later. Actions that were seemingly contradictory to American patriotism were covered up, ignored, and forgotten in order to perpetuate the legacy of virtuous freedom-seeking founders. This is unnecessary.

¹ The founding generation believed that their republican experiment would fail or succeed based on the amount of public virtue and they were in constant anxiety about their own worthiness. The deliberate simplification of the Revolution was, in part, a reaction to this anxiety. Revolutionary rebels wrote their own history as it was happening to reassure themselves as well as to establish a legacy for the new republic to follow. See: Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1969). For how this was done differently by soldiers and by civilians, see: Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People At War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980). For how the conscious shaping of the legacy of the Revolution was continued by the next generation see: Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2001). For the importance of political festivals in establishing the legacy of the revolution see: David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997). A great book on historical memory of the American Revolution, and how its legacy changed in the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries is: Alfred F. Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party: Memory and the American Revolution* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2000).

Multiple and diverse loyalties existed in every individual, and if we look at the interrelationships of these identities, the actions of the founding generation can be explained more fully and more accurately. Loyalty to one's own survival, social standing, family, friends, region, state, and – as it emerged – the new nation, sometimes led people to act in seemingly inconsistent ways. But, if we take the people as complex individuals, their intentions become clearer.

How were identities and loyalties formed during this conflict? How can we explain the behaviors of regular people, people who did not know at the time which side was going to win the war? I do not attempt to answer these questions for the entire population of revolutionary British North America, or even one region of it. Instead, I attempt to answer them for just one man: Thomas Johnson of Newbury, Vermont. He is chosen in part because of one factor that contributes to most historians' research subjects: his life is well documented. Many documents written by and about Johnson, including letters, store accounts, receipts, memoirs, and a diary are currently held at the Leahy Library by the Vermont Historical Society. These documents, coupled with a variety of secondary sources on his town, state, and new nation, show the complicated relationship between social, regional, and national identities, and illustrates how the war revealed the tenuous and fluid nature of these loyalties, sometimes resulting in open conflict between them.

I argue that the meanings of “gentleman,” Vermonter, and American were still being constructed, and were in flux at the time of the Revolution; that multiple layers of identities influenced Johnson's Revolutionary War actions and experiences and that because of the complicated layers of identities and their malleable nature, the founding

fathers' generation was full of more ambiguity than is traditionally presented. While I have focused on this one man's life, my conclusions will shed light on the lives of many who faced an unpredictable future because of the war. In fact, his first and surnames, Thomas and Johnson, are so common it's almost as if he were a character made up to tell such a story – the “John Doe” of the Revolution.

I begin by analyzing Johnson's social identity. As a large landowner, and eventually the richest man in Newbury, Johnson saw himself as a gentleman, despite the relative social isolation of his frontier location, and he was recognized as such by his peers with an officer commission in the militia in 1775. American-born military officers considered themselves to be part of the greater trans-Atlantic culture of gentility, but they were not always recognized as such by their European counterparts because of the provincial origin of their status and their label as insurgents. However, because of General Washington's persistence, they were eventually allowed to participate in certain officer privileges, including parole and exchange if captured by the enemy, and Johnson benefitted from these privileges when he was captured by the British in 1781. Who was considered genteel and a part of the culture of “Military Europe” was changing during Johnson's lifetime to include colonial-born men as well as frontier settlers far from the cultural establishments in urban port cities. These inclusions, however, were also met with resistance. The fluidity of the gentleman identity, caused by colonial persistence and the general casting off of the social concept of deference, gave Johnson the opportunity to rise socially, and was one of the primary identities that shaped his experience as a prisoner-of-war and as a participant in the Revolution.

The second chapter examines the identity of the state in which Johnson lived. The precise political identity of the land that became Vermont was in question from the time of the first European settlements there in the mid eighteenth-century. Land in Vermont was claimed by the royal colonies and then the republican states of both New York and New Hampshire, eventually resulting in Vermont announcing its independence from both. Because of the dispute, the United States Continental Congress refused to recognize the state of Vermont, causing some of Vermont's leaders to look elsewhere for allies. Secret negotiations with the British, known as the Haldimand Negotiations, began in 1780. While in captivity in Canada, Johnson was brought into these negotiations. After eight months of imprisonment, Johnson was allowed parole to go home to Newbury on the condition that he would deliver intelligence to the British to help towards the union of Vermont with Great Britain. Johnson agreed, but he also informed the rebel leaders in his home region and gave them intelligence on the British agenda in Canada. Because of the fluid and fluctuating identity of Vermont, Johnson became a (somewhat reluctant) double-agent. Further, by informing on the British, Johnson was in effect breaking his parole oath, which conflicted with his identity as an honorable gentleman officer.

The third chapter follows Johnson in the last months of the war, from the summer of 1782 to early 1783, and analyzes the public perception of national identities. During this time, Johnson was under pressure to clarify his true national identity; he was now under suspicion by people on both sides. At the same time, however, there were people on both sides that trusted him, perhaps in part because they were used to working with obscure and opaque loyalties. In fact, the majority of colonists were never made to publicly announce their loyalties. It was for that reason that all revolutionary states set up

systems to try to identify their citizens' loyalties. Petitions, court trials, black lists, and oaths of allegiance were just a few of the ways in which they tried to make people's national loyalties public. However, many people changed their publicly declared allegiance over time based on which occupying force was most threatening, and their contemporaries did not often view their patriotism as being compromised for doing so. Instead, much flexibility was given to people in making public their national identity, perhaps suggesting that we should adopt a broader definition, and one that is less ideological, of what it meant to be a patriotic participant of the American Revolution. The identity of the new nation was being formed, as was the identity of its citizens, during the course of the war, and during this phase of construction, there was a lot of fluidity in these identities.

For many years the historiography of the American Revolution has been focused on the origins of the ideas of revolution and why the founding generation chose republicanism as its form of government. The "republican synthesis," contributed to most notably by Caroline Robbins, Bernard Bailyn, and Gordon S. Wood, has placed the American Revolution in context with its roots in English liberalism, while giving credit to distinct American factors, such as the potency of religion.² Instead of analyzing what the revolutionary beliefs were and how people came to identify with the revolution, I am looking at how people, in this case Thomas Johnson, showed his identity publicly, how others interpreted his national identity, and how this identity influenced his experience. I

² See Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967); Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth Century Commonwealthman* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959); and Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic*).

am less interested in what Johnson's ideology was and more interested in the public perception of his identities. My methodology is more in line with historians Judith Van Buskirk and Ken Miller, whose microhistories of how the Revolution actually played out in specific communities show that the attempt to establish an autonomous national identity was challenged by the blurry lines between loyalties, and that individuals were often more concerned with personal relationships than with the national political stage.³ Lastly, methodologically I follow in the tradition of the Neo-Progressives, who help form a broader and more encompassing definition of the revolution by adding "the bottom up" to the top-down stories. With this thesis, I hope to further broaden our understanding of the Revolution.

Despite the multiple boxes of Johnson's records that have been preserved, Thomas Johnson has never been the topic of a monograph-length study. One likely reason that he has been overlooked is his relatively low status as a gentleman. Historians have often favored men whose contributions produced more measurable results and who held higher titles and ranks, such as statesmen and generals. Many of the men with whom Johnson interacted during the war have been honored as the main subjects of books, including General George Washington, General Frederick Haldimand, Ethan Allen, Ira Allen, Major General William Heath, Colonel William Marsh, Moses Hazen, Moses Robinson and Justus Sherwood.⁴ Despite Johnson's widespread connections, or perhaps

³ Ken Miller, *Dangerous Guests: Enemy Captives and Revolutionary Communities during the War for Independence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014); Judith Van Buskirk, *Generous Enemies: Patriots and Loyalists in Revolutionary New York* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

⁴ Thomas Johnson has been overlooked by historians, but many of his revolutionary acquaintances have been covered. There have been many monographs focusing on George Washington in the Revolutionary

because of them, Johnson has been cast aside by historians who would rather write about his more well-known associates. In the well-researched overview of the history of Vermont by historians Michael Sherman, Gene Sessions, and Jeffery Potash, entitled *Freedom and Unity*, Johnson is omitted in favor of his friend and compatriot General Jacob Bayley, in part because of Bayley's senior military rank.⁵

Another likely reason that Johnson has been overlooked by so many historians of the Revolution has to do with the timing and location of his experiences. Because it lacked strategic significance in the context of the greater War for Independence, historians have largely ignored frontier New England during the latter half of the war, after the decisive battles at Saratoga forced the main campaigns to move south. In the preface to historian John Bakeless's book on spies and intelligence networks during the Revolution, Bakeless explains that he excluded the "plotting and intrigue in New Hampshire and Vermont; and also American espionage in Canada," stating that their exclusion is "no great loss, since the work of these secret agents, though skilled and

War; the most recent of which is: Robert Middlekauff, *Washington's Revolution: The Making of America's First Leader* (New York: Knopf, 2015). Another patriot leader with whom Johnson was acquainted was: William Heath, *The Revolutionary War Memoirs of Major General William Heath*, ed. Sean M. Heuvel (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2014). Some of Johnson's fellow founding Vermonters who have been examined include: John J. Duffy and H. Nicholas Muller, *Inventing Ethan Allen* (Hanover, New Hampshire: UPNE, 2014); James Benjamin Wilbur, *Ira Allen, Founder of Vermont, 1751 - 1814* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1928); Allen Seymour Everest, *Moses Hazen and the Canadian Refugees in the American Revolution* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Printing, 1977); Robert A. Mello, *Moses Robinson and the Founding of Vermont* (Barre, VT: Vermont Historical Society, 2014). Additionally, a biography of General Jacob Bayley, a peer and close friend of Thomas Johnson's, is currently in the making by historian Carl Anderson. Some of the men who worked with Johnson in Canada were: Mary Beacock Fryer, *Buckskin Pimpernel: The Exploits of Justus Sherwood, Loyalist Spy* (Toronto, ON: Dundurn, 1996); Jennifer S. H. Brown and Wilson B. Brown, *Col. William Marsh: Vermont Patriot and Loyalist* (Denver, Colo.: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013); Jean N. McIlwraith, *Sir Frederick Haldimand: The Makers of Canada* (Toronto, ON: George M. Morang, 1910).

⁵ Michael Sherman, Gene Sessions, and P. Jeffrey Potash, *Freedom and Unity: A History of Vermont* (Barre, VT: Vermont Historical Society, 2004).

daring, never led to important military results.”⁶ For a historian focused primarily on military tactics, battles, and strategy, Bakeless has a point. However, the lack of strategic military importance does not negatively affect an examination of the loyalties that shaped people’s lives. In fact, a borderlands setting, where there were more and diverse options with which to identify, is a more fruitful setting for an inquiry into how and why people identified the way they did.

Johnson has been featured prominently in local histories of Newbury, VT, starting with the Reverend Grant Power’s *Historical Sketches of the Discovery, Settlement, and Progress of Events in the Coos Country* originally published in 1841.⁷ The more recent, though still centennial, *History of Newbury* by Frederic Wells (1902) devotes an entire chapter to Thomas Johnson’s Revolutionary War experiences, and Wells’ work is mentioned frequently in the thesis that follows.⁸ Both historians acknowledge the accusations against Johnson’s patriotism, but argue that Johnson was an unwavering patriot who used his double-agency purely for the benefit of the rebels. While I, too, ultimately put Johnson on the side of the rebellion, I do so for a different reason. I also believe that the suspicions and threats against Johnson were stronger than Powers or Wells wished to acknowledge and that Johnson’s intentions came from more than just a desire to help the new United States. Johnson’s story shows that we need to broaden our

⁶ John Edwin Bakeless, *Turncoats, Traitors, and Heroes* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1960), 3–4.

⁷ Grant Powers, *Historical Sketches of the Discovery, Settlement, and Progress of Events in the Coos Country and Vicinity, Principally Included Between the Years 1754 and 1785* (Haverhill, N.H., J. F. C. Hayes, 1841).

⁸ Frederic Palmer Wells, *History of Newbury, Vermont: From the Discovery of the Coös Country to Present Time* (St. Johnsbury, VT: The Caledonian Company, 1902).

understanding of what an American patriot was in order to include the fluctuations and complexities of loyalty.

It is worth briefly discussing the meanings of the terms “identity” and “loyalty” as they are used almost interchangeably throughout this thesis. In many cases they both work to mean the same thing – that is, what one thinks of oneself and therefore aligns oneself with (sometimes more consciously than other times). When speaking about a cause or a group, it often makes sense to use the term “loyalty” over “identity,” but the opposite is the case when speaking about one’s social class, religion, sexual orientation, or gender. Yet, all of these identities and loyalties work in much the same way to shape our experiences. And, as in the case of Thomas Johnson, they can clash in ways that force us to choose between them, whether loyalty or identity.

I have not written a biography of Thomas Johnson, but a microhistory of identity during the American Revolutionary War. By looking closely at Thomas Johnson’s social, state, and national identities I would like to make a bigger statement about the complex and fluid nature of choosing sides in a war. Neither blame nor reverence should be assigned without the full story.

PROLOGUE

Thomas Johnson's Opportunities from "Indian Troubles"

On April 2, 1742, at the end of a particularly long and harsh winter, during which ice on the Merrimack River was reportedly two and a half feet thick, Thomas Johnson was born as the sixth child of John Johnson and Sarah Haynes of Haverhill, Massachusetts.¹ The Johnsons were a modest frontier farming family in northern Massachusetts, about fifteen miles inland from the coast. Their family had been in Haverhill for four generations, but shortly after Thomas' birth, they crossed the New Hampshire border to the village of Timberlane. In 1749 this village was chartered by the New Hampshire royal governor and renamed Hampstead. The Johnsons were one of the first families to settle in Hampstead, having arrived at least by 1743, as John Johnson's name appears, alongside four other Johnsons, presumably relatives, on a 1743 petition to the New Hampshire governor for parish privileges to set up a church and hire a pastor. John Johnson was also present for the July 29, 1746 Council Meeting that produced a petition asking the royal governor for a town charter.

Life on the frontier was difficult in many ways. Hampstead was described as having soil so "stubborn" that it had discouraged any attempts for earlier settlement by Native Americans and other frontier colonists.² In addition to infertile soil, Mother

¹ Harriette Eliza Noyes, *Memorial of the Town of Hampstead, New Hampshire* (Boston, MA: George B. Reed, 1899), 1–12, 30–1.

² Isaac W. Smith, *History of the Town of Hampstead, N.H., For One Hundred Years, As Contained in a Historical Address Delivered July 4, 1849*. (Haverhill, MA, 1884), 30.

Nature plagued the Hampstead settlers with other hostile acts and animals. In 1749, when young Thomas was seven years old, there was a drought so great that one Hampstead resident reported that “five acres of good land, newly laid down, produced but one load of hay,” much less than previous harvests. In 1756, disease struck the town. An epidemic of some “malignant fever” killed thirty townspeople, a number that represented about 10% of the entire population at the time. The settlers were also the victims of predatory wolves, so much so that in 1753, the town offered a bounty for every wolf killed. The most feared hardships of frontier life, however, were the dreaded Indian raids.

In 1849, a resident and local historian of Hampstead wrote that “the ruthless savage was continually prowling about each settlement, and in an unguarded moment murdering or carrying into hopeless captivity, women and children....[Hampstead was] the scene of constant alarm from the actual or much dreaded attack of the Indian.”³ This is, of course, a biased interpretation of history, highlighting the savagery and horrors of American natives without acknowledging the extensive land displacement they experienced at the hands of thousands of European settlers, nor the lethal diseases brought by the latter, which wiped out an estimated 90% of native populations in the first years of European encroachment in the Americas. However, it is reflective of the fears many settlers felt in the mid to late eighteenth-century as the settlements and families they had worked hard to create were threatened by Indian war parties.

The Massachusetts and New Hampshire frontier was frequented by Indian raiding parties during the colonial years, and the Haverhill-Hampstead area was not exempt. In

³ Ibid., 9.

fact, in George Wingate Chase's 1861 *History of Haverhill, MA*, the chronological organization is broken up so that every other chapter can narrate the "Indian Troubles" of that time period, including 1675-1678, 1688-1695, 1700-1710, and 1713-1725.⁴ Early ancestors of Thomas Johnson were among some of the victims.

Haverhill was attacked in 1708 by a group of Algonquian and Abenaki warriors and French soldiers, under the command of French Jean-Baptiste Hertel de Rouville, the same commander who oversaw the now infamous raid on Deerfield, MA in 1704.⁵ On August 29, 1708, the raiding party entered the town right before dawn, catching the sleeping villagers by surprise. John Keezar was the first to see them and immediately fired his gun to give warning. It was too late, though. His gunshots served only to bring men to their doors to investigate, where they were shot on sight. John Johnson, a great-uncle of Thomas Johnson, and the first Johnson to move to Haverhill, MA in 1675, opened his door at the sound of his alarm only to be shot in his doorway. His wife, Katherine, escaped with their one-year-old grandchild through the garden, but was pursued. She, too, was shot, but as she fell, her body covered the baby so that it was concealed from the enemy and survived. Fourteen others were killed that day, all before sunrise, including Ruth Johnson, John Johnson's daughter-in-law, who had been a

⁴ Many of these years coincided with European imperial wars, including the Nine Years War (1688-97), War of Spanish Succession (1701-1717), and War of the Quadruple Alliance (1718-20).

⁵ For a description of the 1708 Haverhill raid, and other Indian raids on Haverhill, see George Wingate Chase, *The History of Haverhill, Massachusetts: From Its First Settlement, in 1640, to the Year 1860* (George Wingate Chase, 1861), 219–25. Also of interest might be Cotton Mather's account of the 1687 Haverhill raid. Mather interviewed Hannah Dustin, a captive who became an Indian attacker when she slaughtered the Indians who held her and other Haverhill settlers captive in order to make her escape. Her captivity narrative was published in Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana: The Ecclesiastical History of New Enlgad* (London: The Bible and Three Crowns, Cheapside, 1702).



Figure 1: Tombstone of Ruth Johnson, who was killed in a French & Indian raid in Haverhill, MA in 1708. A victim twice, she had already experienced numerous years as a prisoner of the French and Natives after being captured in a 1687 raid on the town. Photo taken by Caitlyn GD Hopkins and used with permission. (2013)



Figure 2: Tombstones of John Johnson and Katherine Johnson, who were two of sixteen English settlers killed in the 1708 French & Indian raid on Haverhill, MA, and distant ancestors of Thomas Johnson (1742-1819). Photo taken by Kristen Osborn Cart and used with permission. (2010)

prisoner of the French and Indians in her youth when they attacked Haverhill in 1687.

Her tombstone reads,

RUTH, YE WIFE OF
THOMAS JOHNSON
DIED AUGUST YE
29 1708 & IN YE
21 YEAR OF HER
AGE

ONCE W'T YE INDIANS
IN CAPTIVITY,
AFTER 'T WAS HER LOT
IN THEIR HANDS TO DY

In addition to those killed, an unknown number, perhaps about thirty, were taken captive. Some of the captives were able to escape when the local militia pursued their captors, but many never returned.

The 1708 Haverhill raid was part of a greater military strategy in Queen Anne's War, which was, itself, one of numerous wars that were part of a larger theater of empire-clashing between France and Great Britain in North America throughout the mid-seventeenth- to mid-eighteenth-centuries. However, neither King Williams War (1688-1697), Queen Anne's War (1702-1713), Father Rale's War (1722-1725), nor King George's War (1744-1748) settled the border disputes between Britain's northern colonies and the southern part of New France and the western Ohio River Valley. In all of these engagements, French and English troops allied themselves with local native tribes to wreak havoc in their enemies' settlements, while the majority of the power exchanges played out on the high seas. The question of which great European power would control North America remained disputed until the French and Indian War of

1754-1763, when the fighting shifted from the seas to the colonies and from European supplied and commanded Indian warriors to large numbers of regular uniformed European troops shipped across the Atlantic.⁶

The French and Indian War was initiated by a botched mission led by none other than a young George Washington in the Pennsylvanian wilderness in 1754. In what has become known as the Jumonville Affair, Washington's small unit of British soldiers could not control the actions of their Native allies, who killed fourteen of the surrendered French soldiers.⁷ The massacre was seen as unjust since it did not follow the European codes of surrender, and the French responded by mustering their troops to fight. As tensions escalated, the fighting in the Ohio Valley became subsumed by the much larger Seven Years War, an international conflict with fronts not only in Europe and North America, but also in India, the Caribbean, West Africa, and even the Philippines.

French victories in the first few years of the war forced the British to rethink their strategy, and in late 1757 William Pitt, the recently titled First Earl of Chatham and British Prime Minister, changed course. Leaving continental Europe to Prussian allies, Pitt focused most energy on chipping away at the French empire overseas, particularly New France in North America. His plan was to simultaneously use the superior British navy to blockade French-American ports, cutting them off from resupplies, and transport large numbers of British regular troops to fight on land. No matter how many troops the British sent from Europe, though, the numbers were never enough to meet the needs of

⁶ For a full account of the French and Indian War I recommend: Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Knopf Publishing Group, 2000)..

⁷ Ibid., 5-7.

defending the frontier. Pitt relied on colonial assemblies to raise their own troops to join the fight. These Provincial Regiments, the first full-time regiments in colonies that had previously only supplied militias, provided a whole generation of American colonists the military experience they later used to organize the Continental Army.

The most well-known man who participated in the Provincial Regiments was George Washington, who, after the Jumonville Affair, was commissioned in 1755 with a Colonelcy in the Virginia Provincial Regiment. Although Washington appreciated the military experience he received during the French and Indian War, he made no secret about what he felt was ill-treatment of American-born troops by British officers. According to British policy at the beginning of the war, officers of provincial regiments, no matter what their rank, were subordinate to all officers of regular troops. The assumption held by many, including prominent British commander General Loudoun, was that colonials lacked the discipline, and perhaps the ability, to be successful soldiers, much less officers. Loudoun described provincial soldiers and officers as “an Obstinate and Ungovernable People, Uterly Unacquainted with the Nature of Subordination,” and “the dirtiest most contemptible cowardly dogs that you can conceive.”⁸ Many colonial officers, including Colonel Washington, found this lack of rank recognition offensive, and it created much tension between officers born on opposite sides of the Atlantic. In 1756, Washington argued with regular Captain John Dagworthy over the question of seniority during a joint campaign. Even though a colonelcy was higher than a captaincy,

⁸ Ibid., 288.

the European-origin of Dagworthy's commission entitled him to demand Washington's subordination.⁹

Not respecting the ranks of provincial officers inspired a lack of cooperation from colonial troops, and Pitt knew that in order to get the most out of them militarily he would have to stop "treating the colonies like subordinate jurisdictions," and instead "treat them like allies."¹⁰ As of the winter of 1757, only regular officers of equivocal ranks or higher were colonial officers subordinate. Pitt's policies of relative equality, in military ranks as well as in similar political reforms, proved to save Britain in the French and Indian War, and reinforced Americans' sense of self-worth.

In New England, approximately half of all men of military age served in the French and Indian War.¹¹ For the majority of the war, Thomas Johnson was too young to be involved; he did not turn sixteen, the minimum age to join the militia, until April 1758, when there was only a year and a half left of fighting. The French and Indian War did, however, significantly shape Johnson's life by bonding him to Jacob Bayley, a man who would play a significant role later in Johnson's rising star. Additionally, by opening up the frontier to new settlement, the end of the French and Indian War provided young men like Johnson opportunities for upward mobility.

⁹ Ibid., 159. According to Anderson's footnote on p.766, Washington went to temporary British General Shirley about this disagreement. Shirley ruled in favor of Washington. Washington's success, however, does not negate the general anti-provincial environment that led to Dagworthy's claim to begin with. For a table that lists eighteenth-century military ranks in ascending order see: Christopher Duffy, *Military Experience in the Age of Reason* (New York: Routledge, 1987), 66.

¹⁰ Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 214.

¹¹ Ibid., 288.

Jacob Bayley was a peer of Thomas Johnson's father, John. In 1746, Bayley moved with his new bride from Newbury, MA to Hampstead, NH. There, they joined the conservative Congregational community to which John Johnson belonged. Both families are listed in the 1746 town records as pew holders in the new Meeting House.¹² Jacob was a deeply religious man and conservative by nature. He was appalled by the religious revivals that swept the colonies in the eighteenth-century. The Hampstead congregation was visited by these New Light preachers during its early years, but no great revivals followed, to the relief of a majority of the town's inhabitants. In 1762, the town voted "to keep the meeting house doors shut against all such preachers, whose principles and conduct are such, that neither Congregational nor Presbyterian churches amongst us hold communion with, or admit as preachers."¹³ Bayley would have no doubt agreed with Hampstead's late eighteenth-century minister who described the revivalists as "downright infidels...[who] sowed the seeds of wickedness."¹⁴

In addition to conservative religious affiliation, Jacob Bayley and John Johnson shared a similar social standing in the community. At the first Hampstead town meeting, held February 5, 1749, they were chosen as two of the five town selectmen.¹⁵ Therefore, in Thomas Johnson's childhood he would have been familiar with Jacob Bayley as a leader of the community, as a colleague of his father's, and as a fellow church-goer.

¹² Noyes, *Memorial of Hampstead, NH*, 22.

¹³ Smith, *History of the Town of Hampstead, N.H.*, 29.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 18.

Young Thomas likely also attended the village schoolhouse six months a year with Jacob Bayley's eldest son Ephraim, who was four years his junior.¹⁶

During the French and Indian War, Jacob Bayley spent the entire conflict in the service of the military. As a Lieutenant in Captain John Alcott's company of the New Hampshire Provincial Regiment, Bayley scouted around the Lake Champlain region in the fall of 1755.¹⁷ Upon returning from that expedition, Bayley was promoted to Captain and set about raising a new company.¹⁸ In August 1757 Bayley's company was one of many defending Fort William Henry in northeastern New York when it fell to French and Indian forces led by General Montcalm, and were subject to the massive Indian-led massacre that followed. As the Native warriors rewarded themselves for a hard fought battle by plundering the fort and collecting the scalps of British soldiers and camp followers – who found that the French could not enforce their promised safety in light of the Indians' passions – Jacob Bayley fled with all others who were able-bodied and lucky

¹⁶ In a 1750 town meeting, Hampstead voted to “hire a schoolmaster for six months in ye summer season, to teach ye children to read and write,” Ibid., 19; Ephraim's age relative to Thomas Johnson's is taken from: Wells, *History of Newbury, VT*, 437.

¹⁷ On April 14, 1756, the New Hampshire Provincial Assembly had to give Bayley backpay since his start date of active duty was incorrectly assumed to be September 18th, when in fact it was September 5th: Nathaniel Bouton, D. D., ed., *Provincial Papers: Documents and Records Relating to the Province of New-Hampshire, From 1749 to 1763*, vol. VI (Manchester, NH: James M. Campbell, State Printer, 1872), 520. Bayley's actions while in Alcott's company are assumed based on the account given of Moses Thurston, another soldier in the company. Moses Thurston saw active duty from September 22 to November 15, 1755: Brown Thurston, *Thurston Genealogies* (Portland, ME: Brown Thurston and Hoyt, Fogg & Donham, 1880), 59. Bayley's role in Alcott's company is confirmed in Wells, *History of Newbury, VT*, 434–5, , but Wells incorrectly records the campaign to have taken place in 1756.

¹⁸ On April 8, 1756, the New Hampshire Provincial Assembly corrected a list of men who were put under Captain Tash's roll, when in fact they were “Inlisted” by “Capt. Bayly.” Found in: Nathaniel Bouton, D. D., *Provincial Papers of NH*, VI:515; Wells, *History of Newbury, VT*, 435.

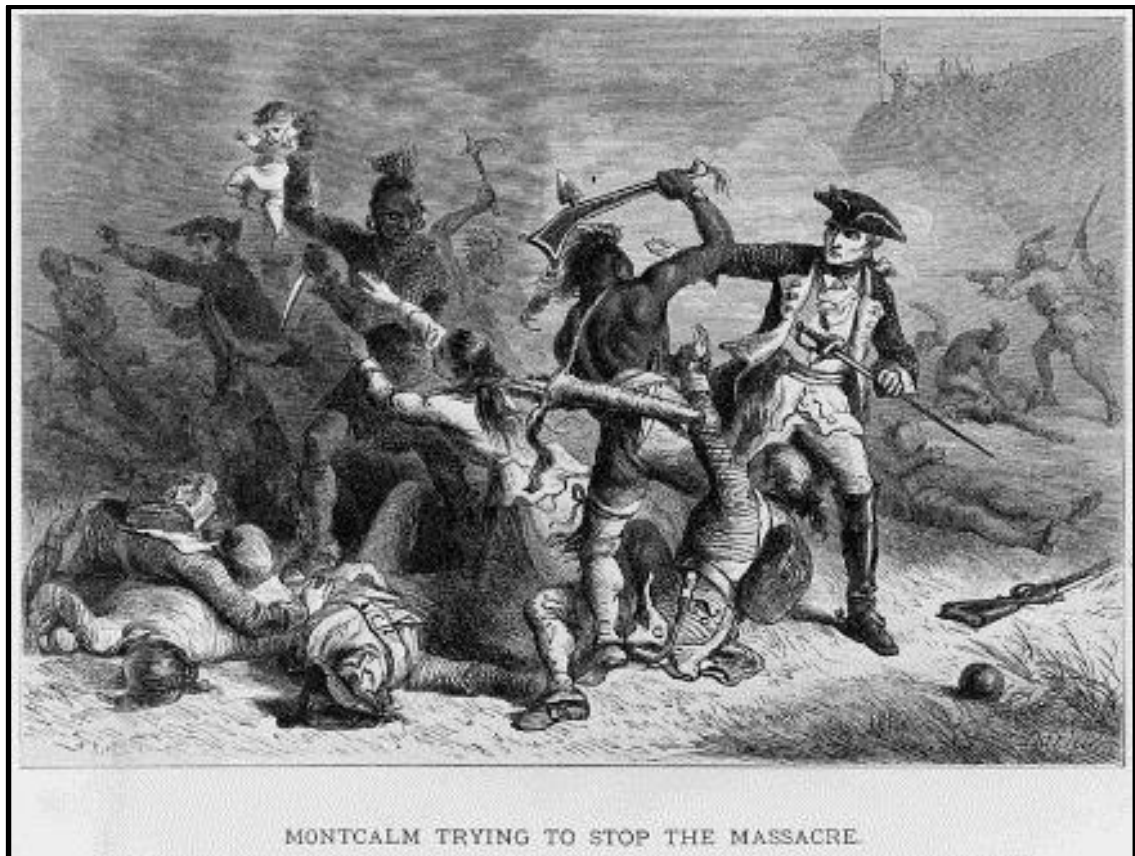


Figure 3: Jacob Bayley only escaped the massacre at Fort William Henry by running barefoot over twelve miles to Fort Edward. In this nineteenth-century depiction, women and children are included as the victims of Native American justice, while French commander Louis-Joseph de Montcalm unsuccessfully attempts to stop the slaughter. The Native-American attacks in western Pennsylvania and at Fort William Henry show that the British and French militaries could not control their Native allies, no matter how superior they believed themselves to be. Image is an engraving by Alfred Bobbett based on an oil painting by Felix Octavius Carr Darley (1822-1888). Image courtesy of the United States Library of Congress.

enough to not be in the rear guard of the retreat. According to Bayley family legend, Jacob escaped by running barefoot the entire twelve miles from Fort William Henry to Fort Edward. Later, the Provincial Assembly of New Hampshire rewarded him £14, 11s, 6p for the loss of his personal affections and military supplies during the retreat, not least of which were his shoes.

The siege of Fort William Henry was one of the last French victories before William Pitt changed the tide of the war in late 1757. Bayley's company partook in victories from then on, and served mostly on and near Lake George and Lake Champlain in northeastern New York.¹⁹ In July 1759 they joined General Amherst's forces in the capture of Fort Carillon on Lake Champlain, and renamed it Fort Ticonderoga.²⁰ The taking of Carillon helped supply a base for the British capture of Quebec, which happened two months later. The successful siege of Montreal in August 1760, an event for which Jacob Bayley was present, sealed the British victory.²¹ Canadian Royal Governor Vaudreuil surrendered to British General Jeffrey Amherst one month later, effectively ending the fighting in North America.

By the end of the war, Bayley had been promoted by the royal colony of New Hampshire to the rank of Colonel.²² His rise through the ranks was not merely a result of his heroic achievements during the war, but also of social networking. According to Thomas Johnson's later recollections, Bayley was indebted to John Johnson, Thomas's father, for his first commission. Johnson recorded that "When genral Bayley was young it was in thy Fathers Power to help him him [sic] to a Commison – which he Did By

¹⁹ Wells, *History of Newbury, VT*, 435.

²⁰ On February 8, 1760, the NH Provincial Assembly approved the payment of "Capt. Jacob Bayly" for supplying "105 men, plus billettin." Bayley was approved for a payment of £899, 4s, ¾p: Nathaniel Bouton, D. D., *Provincial Papers of NH*, VI:739.

²¹ Wells, *History of Newbury, VT*, 435.

²² Bayley is recorded as Lieutenant-Colonel under Goffe, and then as Goffe's successor as Colonel but no dates are given for these promotions: Ibid. Bayley was likely promoted to Lieutenant Colonel as Goffe was promoted to Colonel after Colonel Joseph Blanchard's death in April 1758. The first recorded mention of Bayley as Colonel is in a June 1763 petition to the New Hampshire Assembly: Nathaniel Bouton, D. D., *Provincial Papers of NH*, VI:847. He was likely promoted to Colonel after the fighting ended in late 1760.

RecommenDing Him to the govner of Newhamshier,” and that after the war, Bayley

“Remembered the favours that my father had Don him” and “treated me Vary Well.”²³

With the frontier between New England and Canada now cleared of French resistance at the end of the war, there were many new opportunities for men like Jacob Bayley and those they wished to treat “Vary Well” to rise to the status of gentlemen.

²³ “Thomas Johnson’s Account of Relationship between General Bayley, Bayley Family and Thomas Johnson, C. 1782,” Johnson Papers DOC 574:41, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.

CHAPTER ONE

Thomas Johnson: Gentleman

After five long years of fighting in upstate New York and Canada, Colonel Jacob Bayley finally headed home in the fall of 1760 with three hometown friends and military comrades: Captain John Hazen, Lieutenant Jacob Kent, and Lieutenant Timothy Bedell.¹ They took a direct route home from Montreal, despite the lack of roads and towns along the way. They most likely travelled south on Lake Champlain, west on the Onion (now Winooski) River to the east side of the Green Mountains, and then overland along Indian trails to the Connecticut River, where they camped for a few nights on a great Oxbow about 100 miles north of the Massachusetts border.² It is unknown whether they had traveled this route or camped at this spot during their earlier military campaigns, but, in the fall of 1760 the group decided to make this their permanent home. They returned to Hampstead, NH set on obtaining legal ownership of the land around the Oxbow.

Bayley and his friends were just four of thousands of colonists who looked west and north with the closing of the French and Indian War. The threat of violent raids and capture by French forces and their native allies, which had plagued the Anglo-Americans for almost a century, had been greatly quelled by the English triumph and control of Canada and the Ohio River Valley. Parts of what is now Kentucky, West Virginia, Ohio, Vermont, upstate New York, and western Pennsylvania were infiltrated by European

¹ Although, the arrival of sons born October 1757 and January 1760 suggest that Bayley made it home for at least a few short visits during the war.

² For a history of the earliest years of Newbury, VT see: Wells, *History of Newbury, VT*, 15–51.

settlers seeking cheap land that was thought to be both a natural reward for their military victory and an answer to the farm crowding in the older and more established eastern towns. Even King George's Proclamation Line of 1763, which forbade colonial settlement west of the Appalachians in an effort both to placate the Native Americans after Pontiac's Rebellion earlier that year and to reduce the British Empire to a manageable size, could not dam the flood of colonial opportunists. In the decade between 1760 and 1770, an average of eighteen New England frontier towns were founded per year, as opposed to an earlier annual average of six.³

On May 18, 1763 the charters for Newbury and Haverhill, located on either side of the Connecticut River at the Oxbow, were granted by New Hampshire Royal Governor Benning Wentworth.⁴ Jacob Bayley and John Hazen, the leading petitioners for the charters, had great control over who else joined them as proprietors of the towns. Most of Newbury and Haverhill's founders were neighbors, extended relatives, and friends of these two men. Proprietorship offered many advantages, including the ability to vote on town affairs, influence in land allotments, and, perhaps most importantly, a claim to larger quantities of land than one could otherwise purchase. Bayley and Hazen were able to extend patronage to their peers by offering them positions as proprietors. In remembering the help Bayley received from John Johnson in earning his first commission in the New Hampshire military, the humble beginnings to his now-prominent position as the leader of a new town, Bayley extended a helping hand to Johnson's sons. Under the

³ Colin G. Calloway, *The Scratch of a Pen: 1763 and the Transformation of North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 58.

⁴ A copy of the NH town charter for Newbury can be found in Wells, *History of Newbury, VT*, 368–70.

favor of Jacob Bayley, twenty-one year old Thomas Johnson became a proprietor of the newly chartered Haverhill, NH, while his older brothers Jesse, Caleb, and Haynes were offered proprietorships in Newbury.

Johnson happened to be at the right historical moment to rise to the position of gentleman. The opening of the frontier provided the opportunity for him to become a major figure in a small town. At first only a big fish in a small pond, Johnson's pond grew in size as the former frontier established itself as a outpost of civilization over the next couple decades. Because of the timing of the American Revolution, Johnson's rise also coincided with a military officer commission, which tied him to the greater trans-Atlantic officer culture. All of these opportunities were being offered to men like Johnson for the first time, but only as consequences of the precise historical conditions of the French and Indian War and the American Revolution. Many critiqued the non-traditional way men like Johnson rose to the status of gentleman. What made a gentleman and who could participate in that identity was changing during Johnson's lifetime.

Johnson took full advantage of the opportunities opening up before him. Before the Newbury charter was even granted, Johnson hired himself out to Jacob Bayley to help ready the land for permanent settlers. When Bayley and his friends camped at the Oxbow in 1760, the land surrounding them was truly wild. A few fields on the river's intervale had been cleared by Native Americans who lived seasonally in the area, but dense forests covered everything above the flood-plain. In the summer of 1761, Jacob Bayley and John Hazen led a team of hired men who cleared the fields of the Oxbow and collected ninety tons of hay for a herd of cattle that arrived mid-August. Three men who were left to winter at the site with the herd were joined by the first four permanent settlers February

1762. Thomas Johnson arrived later that summer or fall. Johnson was employed by Bayley to examine the land and survey town boundaries. The boundary markers mentioned in the 1763 town charter of Newbury were likely placed by Thomas Johnson and his colleague Jacob Kent during this time:

Beginning at the Tree marked standing on the Bank of the Westerly side of Connecticut River....from thence Southerly, or South Westerly, down Connecticut river til it comes to a Tree there standing marked with the Figures....from thence running North fifty-nine degrees West Six Miles and one Quarter to a stake and stones,... from thence to a Marked Tree on the Side of the River...⁵

Bayley likely felt paternalistic toward the Johnson boys, particularly since their father died at about this time. When John Johnson died on Thomas's twentieth birthday, April 2, 1762, the debt of honor Bayley owed to Johnson passed to his sons.⁶ The offering of employment and a founding share of a new town was abundant payment.

The death of their father also likely resulted in the materialization of Thomas's and his brothers' inheritance. How John Johnson willed his possessions upon his death is unknown, but much can be assumed based on research by historian Paul J. Greven into eighteenth-century Andover, Massachusetts.⁷ Most likely Thomas's eldest brother, Jesse,

⁵Ibid., 18.

⁶ Thomas Johnson, "A Short History of My Life, C. 1806-12" (Newbury, VT), Johnson Papers DOC 574: 68, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.

⁷ Philip J. Greven, *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972). Greven finds that fathers tended not to divide land into sections smaller than thirty acres. When they could not divide their land any further, often the eldest son inherited the paternal homestead while younger sons often received land in another town, or gifts of money to purchase land in another town. These younger sons often moved further west and north, pushing into the frontier where land was cheaper because it was uncultivated. Many third and fourth generation sons migrated into the frontier in order to own land. Additionally, it was not uncommon for brothers and neighbors to migrate together to the same new town, just as the Johnson brothers (Thomas, Caleb, Haynes, and Peter) moved to Newbury and Haverhill with many of their Hampstead neighbors.

received the paternal homestead in Hampstead. Even though Jesse was a proprietor of Newbury, and was chosen as Town Clerk for the first town meetings of both Newbury and Haverhill, he never moved to either towns. Jesse Johnson stayed in Hampstead, where he had already established himself as a justice of the peace, a Town Clerk, and a land surveyor.⁸ If Jesse received the paternal homestead, which seems likely, Thomas and his two other adult brothers, Caleb and Moses, probably received money to buy land.⁹ Joining Jacob Bayley's new frontier towns would have helped them get the most for their money.

As the youngest adult brother, Thomas was less established in Hampstead than his older brothers, and perhaps explains why he threw himself into the growth of the new towns with more vigor than did they. All within the same year, Thomas Johnson came to adulthood (the age of twenty-one for males), received his inheritance, and was given an opportunity to help build a new town. The means for establishing himself could not have aligned themselves more favorably for the fourth son of a modest family. Like most eighteenth-century men who found themselves suddenly with the means to support a family, Johnson sought a wife.

⁸ Evidence that Jesse Johnson stayed in Hampstead is based on documents printed in Smith, *History of the Town of Hampstead, N.H.*, 15, 18–20, 296, 390–1; On December 8, 1767, Jesse Johnson was chosen to serve on a committee to address disputed land claims. In 1764, Jesse was listed alongside his younger brother Caleb as owning land to be taxed. In June of 1777, Jesse was chosen for a committee to regulate trade. In 1778, he moved to Enfield, NH. Wells, *History of Newbury, VT*, 25–6.

⁹ Thomas's other adult brothers included Caleb, who was twenty-three when his father died, and Moses, who would have been almost twenty-two when his father died if he lived that long. Nothing more is known about Moses other than his birthdate, so it is unknown if he lived to adulthood. In addition to his four oldest sons, John Johnson was survived by an adult daughter, Miriam, who was likely married when her father died, so had probably already received her inheritance, and six young children, (Haynes, age twelve; Sarah, age ten; Ruth, age seven; Peter, age five; Judith, age four; and John, age two), whose inheritance was probably placed into the legal keeping of another relative until they came of age or married.

Thomas Johnson married Elizabeth Lowell on February 12, 1765. Shortly following their union, Thomas moved out of Uriah Morse's Haverhill home, where he had been boarding, and built his first home on the Oxbow. The arrival of his first child in April 1766, whom he named John after his own father, solidified Thomas's new position as a head of household. Elizabeth brought into the world three more sons and one daughter before she died in September 1772, probably from birth complications. Two of her infant sons preceded their mother to the grave.

With three living children, the oldest of which was only five years old, Thomas did not wait long to remarry. Two months and one week after the loss of Elizabeth, Thomas married Abigail Merrill, whose first husband had died not long before. Thomas's second marriage was even shorter than his first; Abigail died only two years later. Their only child was named after her mother. Almost two months to the day of Abigail's death, Thomas married another Abigail, Abigail Carleton, on February 3, 1775. This, Thomas's final marriage, aligned the Johnsons with the Carletons, a prominent family across the river in Haverhill. Thomas's third marriage resulted in eight more children between the years 1776 and 1792.

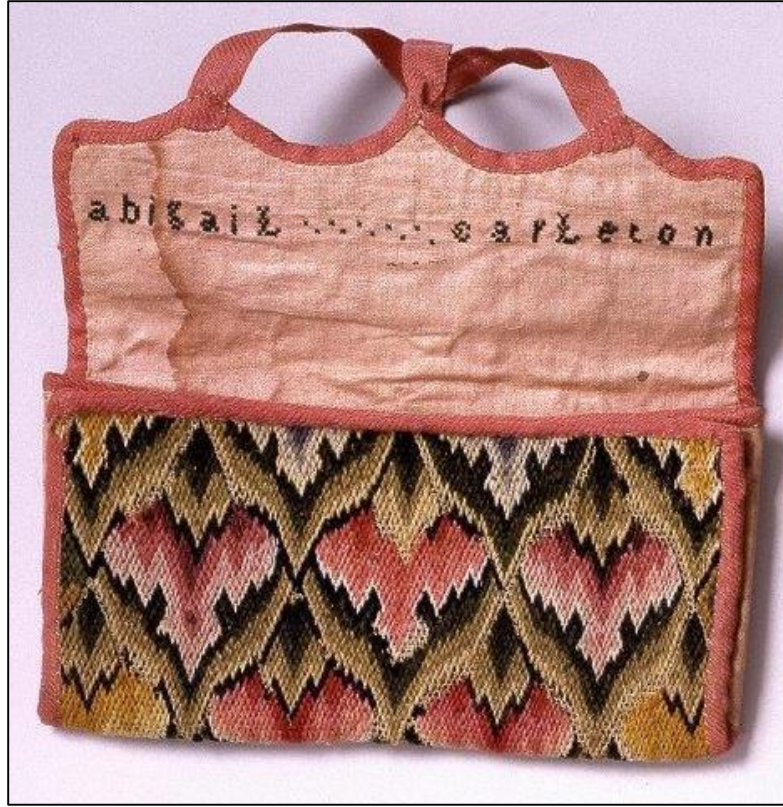


Figure 4: Pocket of Abigail Carleton, Thomas Johnson's third and final wife. Abigail likely stitched this pocket herself, including her name at the top. This pocket is currently on display in Freedom and Unity, the permanent exhibit at the Vermont History Museum in Montpelier, VT. Photo courtesy of the Vermont Historical Society.

Establishing his independence through marriage, owning his own home, and becoming a father were just the first steps on the road to social prominence. Acquisition of wealth was the next step. Like most eighteenth-century men, Thomas Johnson was a farmer, but the life of a farmer was sought after more for its independent lifestyle than for its financial benefits. Thomas Johnson explored other options for income as well. In 1775, he built a new, bigger house on the Oxbow, and offered rooms as an innkeeper. He also ordered a whole wing of this home to be built to accommodate a store. According to surviving store record books, Thomas's merchant business sold everything from sugar

from the West Indies, tobacco from the Chesapeake, tea from the British East India Company, and clothing and household goods from the manufacturing companies in Great Britain. In exchange for locally made products that Johnson likely shipped down the Connecticut to the Atlantic, Johnson connected the residents of Newbury with the finer things of life. In addition to tools and food, Johnson sold white ribbon, black silk, small tea pots, colored feathers, double-bladed knives, and ivory combs.¹⁰ The refinement of his offerings reflected the growing refinement of the man who sold them.

Johnson's store was slow to grow, though, and it faced competition with other country stores in Newbury and Haverhill. Johnson's main source of income most likely came from land speculation. The New England frontier was saturated with speculation in the eighteenth-century. The riches to be gained from accumulating and selling off land for profit was, in fact, one of the main reasons for the abundance of chartered towns in New Hampshire, including Newbury and Haverhill.

¹⁰ Thomas Johnson's surviving store account books are located in the Johnson Collection of the Leahy Library, part of the Vermont Historical Society: Thomas Johnson, "Account Book, May 12, 1794-July 26, 1798" (Newbury, VT, August 1794), Johnson Papers, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library. he records of Johnson's eighteenth-century store not only speak to the lives of Thomas Johnson and his neighbors, but to a larger body of work on the rural economy of early America. The great debate about rural New England focuses around whether its residents were influenced more by market or community *mentalitiés*.¹⁰ The leading historians of this debate are Winifred Rothenberg and Christopher Clark. Clark, a social historian, argues that early rural New England functioned on a moral economy, one that met the needs of the family and community first, and gave only their surpluses for profit.¹⁰ Rothenberg, an economic historian, disagrees, and argues that rural farmers adopted behaviors in line with a market economy as early as 1750.¹⁰ Both Clark and Rothenberg's research focuses primarily on farmers. Diane Wenger's study of a rural Pennsylvanian storekeeper presents a more nuanced picture, a blending of the two economic strategies. Like Wenger's storekeep, Thomas Johnson made some of his choices based on family and community needs, and some choices based on a desire for profit. For more information, please see: Winifred Barr Rothenberg, *From Market-Places to a Market Economy: The Transformation of Rural Massachusetts, 1750-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Christopher Clark, "Economics and Culture: Opening Up the Rural History of the Early American Northeast," *American Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (June 1, 1991): 279-301; Diane E. Wenger, *A Country Storekeeper in Pennsylvania: Creating Economic Networks in Early America, 1790-1807* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2012).

May 12	Doctr Hinomani to 1 galon of R 6/	10	6
1794	20 John Lic to 2 1/2 yd Choice att 3/3 -	8	2
	20 2 1/4 yd Drum att 2 1/4 - 5/2 -	5	3
	to 1 seane silk 1/7 - to 1 ten 1/4 - to 1 ten 1/4	4	1
	to 1 paper Pin 1/6 - to 1 silk Handker 6/	6	6
		1	4
21	Jane Bayley to 9 1/2 White Lead att 1 1/4	9	3
	to 6 Whiting 2/4		
	Moses Moores to 1 paper Pin 1/2 Dubl Kn	4	-
	20 1/2 Batting 1/6 -	3	6
	by Cash 3/	3	-
	Jane Bayley to 6 yds Whiting 2/4		
	by Cash 1/4		
	Saml Rogers to 1/4 of Cotton woad 3 Sheds paper	9	3
	Saml Trarund to 1 small Brass Lock	1	6
	Doctr Hinomani to Cash sent 6/	6	-
24	Joseph Parsons to 3 yds black silk		
26	Doctr Hinomani to 1 pint w. oil	1	3
	Samuel Richardson to 1 m. board nail 5 to 10 p. 1/4	1	6
	Dudley Carlton to 2 yds shoe binding		3
	to 1 at 1/6		
	Nat Chamberlin to 1/4 Cotton woad		
30	Solomon Bittell to 3 W. Shags 1/4 9 - 2/3	2	3
	to 1 1/4 Ten 1/7		9
	Quincy Carleton to 1/2 paper Pin		6
	20 3/4 1/4 1/6 - to 1 seane silk 1/7	1	1
	Moses Johnson to 1 Cap 1/4 1/4 1/4 1/4 1/4 1/4		6
	Jonathan Fowler to hair Ribbon		8
June 2	Dudley Carleton to 1 pint Kn	1	6
1794	John Snapp to 1 pint Kn 1/4 1/4 1/4 1/4 1/4 1/4	1	6
	Moses Foster to 1 pint Kn		
	Doctr Hinomani to 1 pint w. oil		
	Jacob Redel to 1 pint Kn		
	Doctr Hinomani to 1 pint w. oil		

Figure 5: A page out of Thomas Johnson's store records. On this page, one can see many of the items that Johnson sold, including tea, cotton, rum, and silk. Image courtesy of the Vermont Historical Society.

Newbury and Haverhill were just two of 116 town charters granted by Royal Governor Benning Wentworth between 1760 and 1763, granted against royal instructions for orderly settlement.¹¹ According to British colonial law, as soon as a town was chartered, fifty male settlers were required to immediately inhabit the land. To retain their right to it, they needed to cultivate one-fifth of the granted acres within the first five years. In reality, there were less than 1,000 settlers total in the newly chartered towns, and less than 30,000 acres improved in the first five years. Instead of for the growth of colonial communities, the main purpose of Wentworth's charters was to accumulate wealth for the governor and his friends and allies. In each charter, Wentworth granted himself a large holding. He never lived on these lands, and visited very few. Many were, like in Newbury, hundreds of miles from Wentworth's home and center of business. They existed purely for the governor to sell for profit when the town, and the worth of the land, grew. In 1774, Haverhill resident Moses Little purchased Wentworth's shares for \$38. Governor Wentworth had never even seen the land in the eleven years he owned it.

The royal governor was not the only one in the business of buying cheap land and selling it later at a higher value. Many men with the means to invest did so. When Moses Little bought Wentworth's Haverhill shares, he also purchased the "house and meadow lot of James Nevin."¹² In the same town meeting that recorded Little's purchases, Jonathan Hall bought four different people's shares for a total of \$71. In January 1771, Haverhill town founder John Hazen became the largest land owner when he purchased

¹¹ Sherman, Sessions, and Potash, *Freedom and Unity*, 73.

¹² William F. Whitcher, *History of the Town of Haverhill, New Hampshire* (Concord, NH: The Rumford Press, 1919), 25–6, 433.

the rights of nine other proprietors whose land lay in an unbroken tract in the center of town. The next year, a man named John Fisher bought the large holding from Hazen. Fisher lived in Salem, Massachusetts, over 140 miles away. He never moved to Haverhill, and instead the land remained unsettled and undeveloped until it was sold early in the nineteenth-century. According to one historian, Fisher's purchase of the land was "purely speculative and selfish."¹³

There were many smaller land transactions recorded in the early town meetings.¹⁴ Of the seventy-seven original proprietors, only ten moved to Haverhill, and only six remained permanently. In Newbury, about half of the seventy-five original proprietors lived there. The proprietors who did not move there, such as Jesse Johnson, sold their shares for a profit. Thomas Johnson only lived in Haverhill for a short time before removing to Newbury. It is likely that he sold his Haverhill land in order to buy the land on which he built his first home in Newbury, though no record exists. Once in Newbury, Thomas Johnson moved to acquire more land. Within the first five years of Newbury's charter, Johnson became a proprietor, a position that was by then shared with only thirty others (as opposed to the seventy-five original proprietors).

¹³ John Fisher, it turns out, was related to the Wentworths through marriage. Fisher's wife was a niece of Benning Wentworth and a sister to Benning's successor, John Wentworth. Fisher's investments in Wenworth-chartered towns were likely due to his insider information as an extended family member.

¹⁴ See Witcher, *History of the Town of Haverhill, New Hampshire*, 19–20.

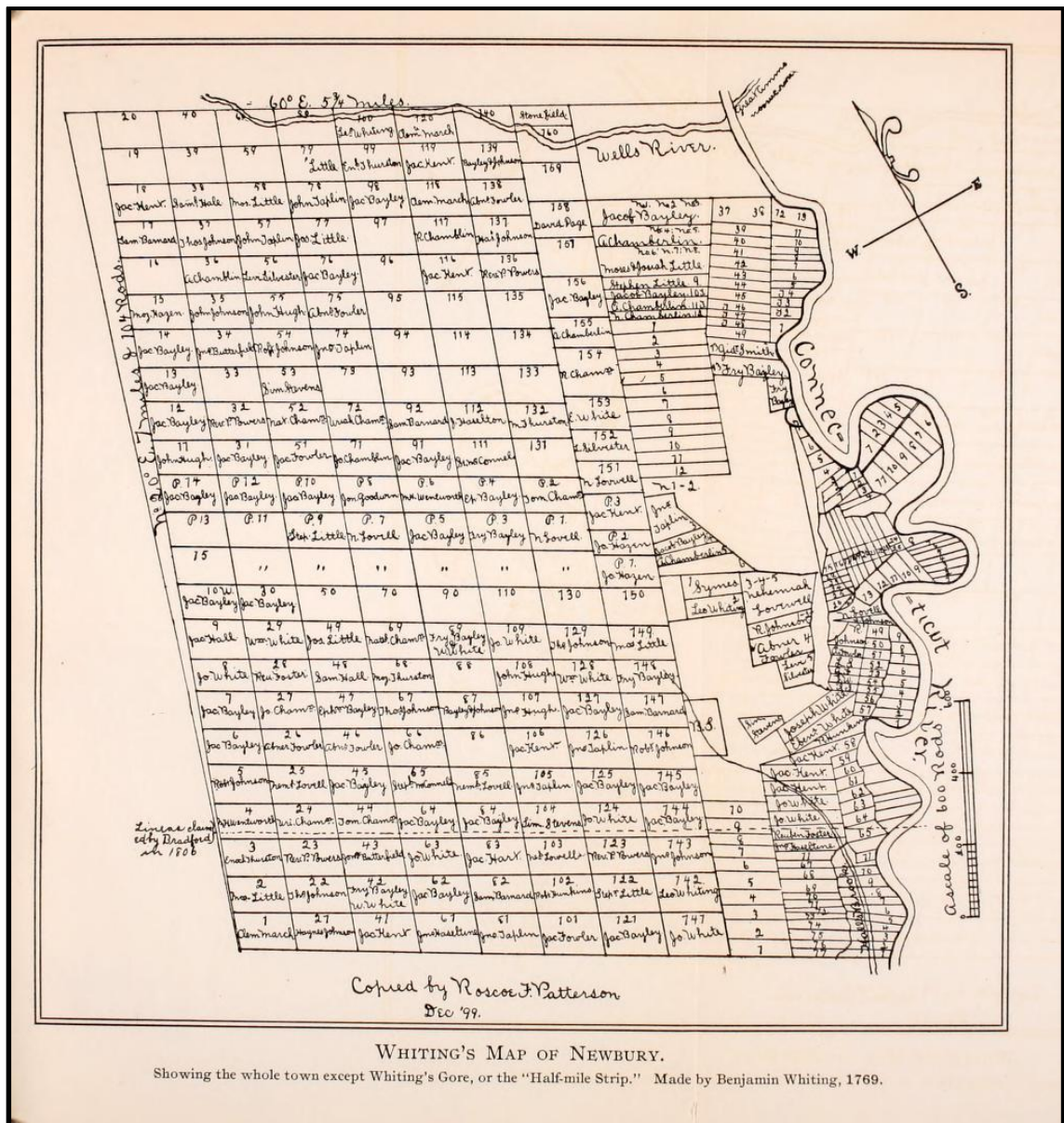


Figure 6: An 1899 copy of a 1769 Map of Newbury's land allotments. Thomas Johnson owned plots numbered 22, 37, 67, and 129. His brothers owned plots numbered 27, 81, 105, and 743. The Bayleys and the Johnsons jointly owned plots numbered 87 and 139. This map is printed in Frederic P. Wells, History of Newbury, Vermont (1902).

In a 1769 map Thomas Johnson is listed as owning four different shares throughout the town, and he continued to add to his holdings over time.¹⁵ For example, in 1779, Johnson bought Newbury lot number fifty-five from Dr. Samuel Hale.¹⁶ Surviving receipts show that Johnson bought and sold land in towns near Newbury as well. In his later life, Johnson's profiteering upset at least one mature matriarch, who accused Johnson of deceiving her husband when purchasing their land. She believed Johnson withheld the true value of the land, and when her husband "asked you what Price was talkd of [between Johnson and a surveyor], you should have told." Instead, she claimed that Johnson "stood in the way of our getting more," and requested Johnson pay "25 Pound more."¹⁷

By 1772, Johnson was a respected family man, a proprietor, a large land owner, and a successful merchant. He had acquired enough standing in the community to be sent to the New Hampshire Provincial Legislature on behalf of another's petition. Johnson represented Richard Chamberlain, who wished to continue his decade-old ferry service across the Connecticut River even though the legislature had recently granted a monopoly to another man, an endeavor in which Johnson was successful; Chamberlain was allowed to continue his business.¹⁸ Johnson's status continued to rise as his finances did, and by 1773, he had acquired enough wealth that he was able to loan money to the town of

¹⁵ The map is located in Wells, *History of Newbury, VT*, between p. 36 & 37. It is reprinted in this thesis.

¹⁶ Ibid., 56. Hall had bought it earlier off of John Hugh.

¹⁷ "Letter from Martha Powers to Thomas Johnson, February 25, 1797" (Deer Isle, MA), Johnson Papers DOC 574: 58, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.

¹⁸ Wells, *History of Newbury, VT*, 62.

Newbury to buy shingles and timber for a new meeting house.¹⁹ Investing in public infrastructures, such as meeting houses, was the culminating indication of one's gentleman status in the eighteenth-century British Atlantic world.²⁰ By 1781, Johnson surpassed even his mentor, Jacob Bayley, as the richest man in town.

Within the first ten to twelve years in Newbury, Johnson positioned himself to become a one of the leading men of the upper Connecticut River Valley. All he needed now was a title to officially reflect his social standing. This opportunity came in late April of 1775 when news of the battles of Lexington and Concord arrived, which happened the same day that the frame of Johnson's new house, much bigger and grander than his original home which reflected his growing status, was being raised. That evening three Newbury men, including Thomas's eighteen year old brother Peter, packed up and headed to Boston to volunteer to fight for the rebellion. In Newbury, a militia was formed of men from Newbury and nearby Barnard. Thomas was elected Captain, for which he was paid £12 per month.²¹

Because of Peter's young age, bachelor status, and minimal ties to business and investments, he fit the demographic of a Continental soldier much more so than his

¹⁹ Ibid., 68. Thomas Johnson was also in charge of this meeting house's demolition in 1801, which makes a convenient circle to the story of the building.

²⁰ See Part III: "Becoming a Gentleman" in David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735-1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 279–383.

²¹ Wells, *History of Newbury, VT*, 74; John Ellsworth Goodrich and Vermont. General Assembly, *The State of Vermont: Rolls of the Soldiers in the Revolutionary War, 1775 to 1783* (Rutland, Vt., Tuttle company, 1904), 2, 11. Thomas Johnson's pay of £12 per month was altered to £8 per month in 1785, when the pay was finally received.



Figure 7: Photo of the house Thomas Johnson built in 1775. Its frame was being raised when news of the battles of Lexington and Concord arrived in Newbury. The house's grandness reflected the rising social status of its owner. In a 1983 application to include the home as part of a National Historic District, it was described thus: "...one of the grandest structures in Newbury and is important for several reasons. It is considered the earliest extant structure in Newbury and illustrates the high caliber of design and craftsmanship that could be obtained during Vermont's early years... very few examples of this [Georgian] style exist in the state [of Vermont] and the Johnson-Bailey House represents a laudable translation executed in a wilderness setting... If the portico is original, it qualifies as an interesting, significant oddity that is known to exist only in two other early Vermont river towns... Finally, the enormous size and steep pitch of the hip roof on this house is noteworthy, not only for its stylistic evocation of the Georgian style but for surviving throughout the years intact."²² Photo published in Wells, History of Newbury (1902), between pp.98-9. The date of the photo is unknown, but taken prior to 1902.

²² Margaret DeLaittre, "Oxbow Historic District" (Connecticut River Joint Commission Inc., July 28, 1983), <http://www.crjc.org/heritage/V16-4.htm>.



Figure 8: Thomas Johnson's 1775 home in 2014. Photo taken by author.

brother Thomas.²³ With a family, a house, and a leadership role in the community, Thomas was more deeply rooted in Newbury, so did not join the rebels in Boston even though he supported their cause. Johnson left no record to explain why he identified with the revolution, but he was likely influenced by the beliefs and politics of his mentor and benefactor Jacob Bayley. Additionally, the revolutionary rhetoric of “life, liberty, and property” was probably especially persuasive for many of the frontier settlers in and near

²³ For more information on the demographical make-up of Washington’s soldiers see Chapter One, “Take the Length of Every Soldier: Servants, Sons, and Gentlemen of the Continental Army” in Caroline Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor: Service and Sacrifice in George Washington’s Army* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 1–37.



Figure 9: Road sign for the still-used Bayley-Hazen Road in Peacham, VT, near Deacon Elkin's old home, where Thomas Johnson stayed the fateful night of March 7, 1781. Thomas Johnson scouted the route for this road in 1776. Photo taken by author, 2014.

Newbury, whose property claims were not being adequately supported by the British government.²⁴

For the majority of the war Johnson's unit of citizen soldiers stayed close to home, forming together for a total of only fifty-one (non-consecutive) days during which they drilled, served in the occasional scouting mission, and responded to local threats of Indian and British army raids from Canada. In late March of 1776, after the failure of the Americans' invasion of Canada the previous year, Johnson was enlisted to lead an expedition to "mark out a road" through the Coos Country of Vermont.²⁵ Bayley had convinced Washington that if a shorter route were established from coastal New England

²⁴ By the start of the revolution, property claims in what became Vermont were challenged by New York, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts. This is discussed in more length in Chapter Two.

²⁵ Wells, *History of Newbury*, 76.

to Canada, a more successful engagement with British Canada might be possible. No such Canadian invasion was ever attempted, but Johnson scouted over one hundred miles of road in just under two weeks. He wrote of the difficulty of the job later in life, describing how the ice was just “breaking up in all the Streams... I was under the necessity of wading many miles through ice and water.”²⁶ The road that Johnson scouted in such treacherous conditions was later named the Bayley-Hazen road after Jacob Bayley and John Hazen, who co-organized its construction.

In late 1776 or early 1777 Thomas Johnson was promoted to Colonel.²⁷ He served under General Benjamin Lincoln, whom Washington had placed in charge of coordinating the New England militias. During the early fall of 1777, Colonel Johnson participated in the effort to “annoy, divide, and distract the enemy,” by attacking the enemy’s supply lines from Canada as they marched south under General John Burgoyne.²⁸ On September 17, 1777 Johnson fought at Mount Independence while two

²⁶ Thomas Johnson, “My Defense of Toryism” March 5, 2014, Johnson Papers, Vermont Historical Society. The Bayley-Hazen Road still exists today.

²⁷ Most sources refer to Thomas Johnson as a colonel in the Vermont militia, but some say he was a lieutenant-colonel. Johnson cleared this up in a letter to General Washington: “I was a Captain and afterwards chosen a Lieut Colon in the militia agreeable to the order of the Assembly of New York... before my commission could reach me, Vermont claimed the jurisdiction [and] that I never had the commission.” Johnson accepted his new position as Colonel in the Vermont militia, but the British recognized him as a Lieutenant-Colonel while in Canada. Johnson claimed that he “was obliged to acknowledge myself as such in my parole; or could not have accomplished my designs.” Because of the fluctuating identity of the state of Vermont, and much like the identity of a gentleman, Johnson’s military rank was unfixed. Because of the capricious situation, Johnson conclude, “your Excellency will determine as to my rank. “Letter from Thomas Johnson to George Washington, July 20, 1782” (Exeter, NH), Johnson Papers DOC 574: 22, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.

²⁸ Richard M. Ketchum, *Saratoga: Turning Point of America’s Revolutionary War* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 1999), 376–9.



Figure 10: Site of fighting on Mount Independence in October 1777 between Rebel and British forces. Despite the overgrowth of forest, stone remains of British & Hessian structures can still be seen. Photo taken by author, 2014.



Figure 11: Fort Ticonderoga, originally built 1755-1759. Reconstructed 1909-present. Photo taken by author, 2013.

other regiments led simultaneous attacks of nearby Mount Defiance and Fort Ticonderoga. When the action stopped, Johnson sat down to write his wife:

I have had But Little Sleep this 3 nights for the Roaring of Canon and the Crackling of guns Contunley in our Ears. I must say that I felt ugly when I first heard the firing. I have had But 2 Chances of firing my gun at the Enemy... the Canon balls and the grape Ratel Like hale Stones, But they Don't kill men.²⁹

The British maintained their positions on Mount Independence and Ticonderoga, but were forced to surrender around 300 men as well as large quantities of supplies. Johnson was in charge of an escort that marched 100 prisoners eighty miles from Mount

²⁹ "Letter from Thomas Johnson to Abigail Johnson, September 12, 1777" (Mount Independence, n.d.), Johnson Papers DOC 574: 01, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.

Independence to Charlestown, NH on the Connecticut River.³⁰ In addition to British prisoners captured, the rebels also freed 118 of their own men held by the enemy.

The rebels' raids near Ticonderoga revealed the fragility of Burgoyne's supply lines and forced his troops further south into the waiting hands of Continental commander General Horatio Gates. Gates' subsequent victory at Saratoga proved a turning point in the war, as it encouraged the French to join in support of the rebels. Additionally, it persuaded the British to turn the war towards the south. As of late 1777, New England was left relatively to itself.

Hindsight has revealed the relative safety of New England during the second half of the war. At the time, however, northern residents were never certain that the major British forces would not return. Further, the redcoats still held Canada. They continued to build fortifications penetrating deeper into northern rebel-held lands, such as the Blockhouse built in 1781 on present-day North Hero Island in Lake Champlain. Rumors of large-scale invasions from the north, repeating Burgoyne's invasion, circulated widely in the northern frontier, spreading fear and panic. One Newbury resident said that after the American defeat in Canada, they were so afraid of being attacked that within a few days, the Oxbow was fortified with "breast works and block houses sufisint for 1 or 2 thousand men to man. Scouts were sent out in all directions to larn if any enemy was approaching."³¹ It was a time of much confusion and anxiety, for the victory of the rebels was far from certain.

³⁰ Wells, *History of Newbury, VT*, 82.

³¹ Jonathan Elkins, "Reminiscences of Jonathan Elkins: From a Manuscript in the Possession of the Vermont Historical Society," *Proceedings of the Vermont Historical Society, 1919-20*. 23 (1921): 189.

Daily life had to continue, though. The northern frontier towns still had much to do to transform themselves from backcountry outposts to civilized settlements. During the years 1778-1781, the citizens of Newbury farmed, improved their homes, and raised children while the militia drilled and built barracks and look-out towers on the Bayley-Hazen Road, all the while looking over their shoulders to the north.

The last few years of the war in particular were frequented by hostilities from the north. In 1780, Native American raiders allied with the British burnt the village of Peacham, just twenty miles north of Newbury, and carried off to Canada some of its residents. A similar incident occurred that same year in Barnard, about fifty miles southwest of Newbury. Then, on October 15, 1780, the British-allied Natives made their boldest move against the town of Royalton.

The Royalton Raid resulted in thirty-two men taken captive, at least 34 structures lit aflame, and an unknown number of men shot down when they attempted to escape.³² Interestingly, Newbury was one of the intended targets of this raid, but local militia scouts spotted the war party the day before making its way south, and the alarm was raised by the swiftest runners. When news arrived that evening, Newbury residents fled their homes with the fires burning and supper still on the table. One woman remained just long enough to dump her silver spoons down a well for safe keeping. However, a hunting party consisting of Newbury men accidentally intercepted the raiders outside of town. Mistaken as allies, they convinced the Natives that Newbury's defenses were

³² For more information on the Royalton Raid and other raids from Canada during the Revolutionary War see: Gavin K. Watt, *The Burning of the Valleys: Daring Raids from Canada Against the New York Frontier in the Fall of 1780* (Toronto, ON: Dundurn, 1997); Neil Goodwin, *We Go As Captives: The Royalton Raid and the Shadow War on the Revolutionary Frontier* (Barre, Vt: Vermont Historical Society, 2010).

impregnable and its militia numbers great. The attackers wanted an easier target and instead travelled further south to Royalton. The northern frontier was a dangerous place, despite the fact that the most significant battles of the war were taking place in Virginia and South Carolina during this time.

The dangers of living in the frontier near the Canadian border were never clearer to Thomas Johnson than in March of 1781. Just five months after the Royalton Raid, Johnson set out from Newbury for Peacham, a village twenty miles north of the Oxbow, with a team of oxen and two mill stones destined to start a grain-grinding industry in the new town. Like most eighteenth-century gentlemen, Johnson diversified his investments to include merchant business, public structures (like the Newbury meeting house), land acquisition, and industrial pursuits, such as grist mills. For this trip, Johnson enlisted the help of the Page brothers Jacob and Josiah, the former of which was also Johnson's brother-in-law.³³

According to the diary Johnson kept, they left Newbury mid-afternoon of March 5, 1781 and camped that first night in Ryegate, about ten miles upstream of the Connecticut River.³⁴ Johnson described the weather the next morning as "thawy," and the

³³ Wells, *History of Newbury, VT*, 586.

³⁴ Thomas Johnson's experiences from March 5-October 12, 1781 are recorded in a journal (broke into two halves) currently held by the Vermont Historical Society in Barre, VT: Thomas Johnson, "Journal of Captivity in Canada: March 5, 1781-June 22, 1781," Johnson Papers DOCS 574: 03 & 574: 05, Vermont Historical Society.



Figure 12: One of the mill stones Thomas Johnson carried to Peacham. It was on this trip that he was captured in a raid and held as a prisoner-of-war. This stone now sits outside the Daughters of the American Revolution Oxbow Chapter House in Newbury, VT. Photo taken by author, 2014.

mud greatly depleted their oxen's speed and energy. Determined to make it to Deacon Elkin's house in Peacham that night, they jettisoned one of the millstones on the side of the road. Elkins was a former resident of Newbury, the first permanent resident of Peacham, and a loyal customer of Johnson's merchant business. (Johnson delivered a barrel of rum to Elkin with the first mill stone). The next day, Johnson borrowed Elkin's oxen and the deacon's son, Jonathan, to help retrieve the second mill stone, while Josiah Page returned to Newbury with Johnson's exhausted oxen. The job was not finished until very late in the day. Johnson realized he "should have returned home that evening," but he felt "a little unwell," and decided to take advantage of Elkin's hospitality once more. He planned on returning home early the next morning.

That night, Johnson awoke suddenly from his sleep around midnight. Shouts from British soldiers who had somehow entered Deacon Elkins' home raised him from his bed. Trying to stay calm despite the obvious danger of the situation, Johnson made for the window. He may have made it too, if he hadn't delayed to "slip on [his] stockings" first.³⁵ Two soldiers entered the chamber and pointed their guns directly at him. Colonel Johnson was captured as a prisoner-of-war.

The British raiding party sought out Johnson specifically. As a known leader of the militia, it was hoped that his capture would cripple the local rebels as well as possibly provide opportunities to exchange rebel-held British prisoners. Johnson recorded in his diary that he faced the situation with the gallantry of an officer; he "did not find myself the least terrified."³⁶ When two of his captors made ready to tie together his hands, Johnson gave them his word that he submitted himself as their prisoner and would "offer no abuse." Knowing Johnson was a respected gentleman, they trusted his word and he remained unbound.

The soldiers tore through the rest of the Elkins' home and claimed Jacob Page, Jonathan Elkins, and Jonathan's older brother Moses in addition to Johnson. The unfortunate four were kept in a separate room from the rest of the Elkins family – mother, children, and the elderly Deacon Elkins – and were ordered to pack "as fast as possible, taking what provisions they wished." The weather had turned colder since Johnson first set out for Peacham, and by this point four feet of snow blanketed the ground. Rushed in

³⁵ Ibid., March 8, 1781.

³⁶ Ibid.

putting on snow shoes, the prisoners were “ushered out of Dore with all speed,” and hurriedly marched three miles north on the Bayley-Hazen Road.³⁷ There they met up with the rest of the British troops, who numbered a total of twelve and who wore “Indian dress, Blanket, coats, legins & pointed snow shoes.” The prisoners were pushed ten miles before daylight and their first break.

As the break of dawn lit up the faces of those around him, Johnson recognized with dread the dangerous shade of Moses Elkins’ face. Turning to the captain in charge, Johnson pleaded that he send Moses back. He told the Captain that Moses had been “drowned when he was small, and that he would not live through the woods.”³⁸ Further, he accused the Captain of “a mean Cowardly Character, or he would not Crall into peoples houses and capter them while a sleep.” Johnson rebuked the British officer for taking away the children of elderly parents who were dependent on their young to take care of them. The Captain responded that “he new it was enhuman, but he must obay his orders...[but] it shall never be said of me, while I have it in my power, that I shall ever abuse a prisoner.”³⁹ Johnson’s focus on the Captain’s sense of honor was successful, and Moses was sent home.

After another four miles, Johnson received leave to write a note for his family, telling them of his capture and that he was alive. As the only officer captured, Johnson was the only one allowed this privilege. Page’s wife and family would have to either

³⁷ Elkins, “Reminiscences of Jonathan Elkins,” 194.

³⁸ Johnson, “Journal of Captivity,” March 8, 1781.

³⁹ Elkins, “Reminiscences of Jonathan Elkins,” 194.

assume Page was captured while with Johnson or wait to hear it first hand from the witnesses in the Elkin family. Johnson's note was posted on a tree along the trail for the next passerby to find and, hopefully, carry it to its destination.

The march was continued through the rest of the day. By the time they made camp on the banks of the Lamoille River, Johnson was "most terribly tired and faint."⁴⁰ They followed the river for two more days until they reached Lake Champlain on March 10, 1781. The next day, they crossed the frozen waters to Grand Isle. They reached the British outpost of Point au Fer, on the New York side of the lake, in time for dinner that evening. Colonel Thomas Johnson was invited to dine at the Commandant's house, where he "was well treated."⁴¹ Where Page and Elkin ate while at Point au Fer is unknown, but they were not invited to join the gentlemen officers.

When the prisoners arrived at Canadian Fort Isle aux Noix on March 12, 1781, Colonel Johnson was invited to join "Captain Sherwood and Captain Pritchard... [and] Mr. Jones... we drank a bottle of wine."⁴² According to Johnson himself, he was the first prisoner in the history of the fort to not be held in confinement. He still had to remain within the fort grounds, but was otherwise free to roam about and socialize with British officers. Adding to the well treatment of Johnson, "Mr. Spardain," one of the British prisoners under Johnson's care in 1777 who had been exchanged and was now stationed at Isle Aux Noix, confirmed the honorability of Johnson when he informed the

⁴⁰ Johnson, "Journal of Captivity," March 8, 1781.

⁴¹ Ibid., March 11, 1781.

⁴² Ibid., March 12, 1781.

Commandant of the “good he and others had from [Johnson] while they were prisoners.”⁴³ In response, the Commandant promised “good treatment” of Johnson. Because of the sense of honor and reliability that was assumed all gentlemen officers possessed, Johnson benefitted from an international tradition of reciprocity between other, even enemy, officers, and this in turn greatly affected his treatment while a prisoner.

Johnson was kept in Canada as a prisoner of the British army for five months. His journal chronicled the entire experience. He recorded where he spent the night, with whom he conversed and dined, which books and pamphlets he read, and his overwhelming depression and loneliness. He wanted nothing more than to return home to his family in Newbury and found his time as a prisoner passed even more slowly due to boredom. His complaints of lethargy and depression were sometimes quite melodramatic. Johnson recorded one particularly depressing day in his journal with the following:

O, the pleasant imaginations of the night visions, but the horrors of the despairing soul when awakened and capable of receiving the full torrent of the most miserable separation from Love’s sweets, charms, happiness and enjoyments of the soul.⁴⁴

⁴³ Ibid., March 14, 1781.

⁴⁴ Ibid., July 6, 1781.

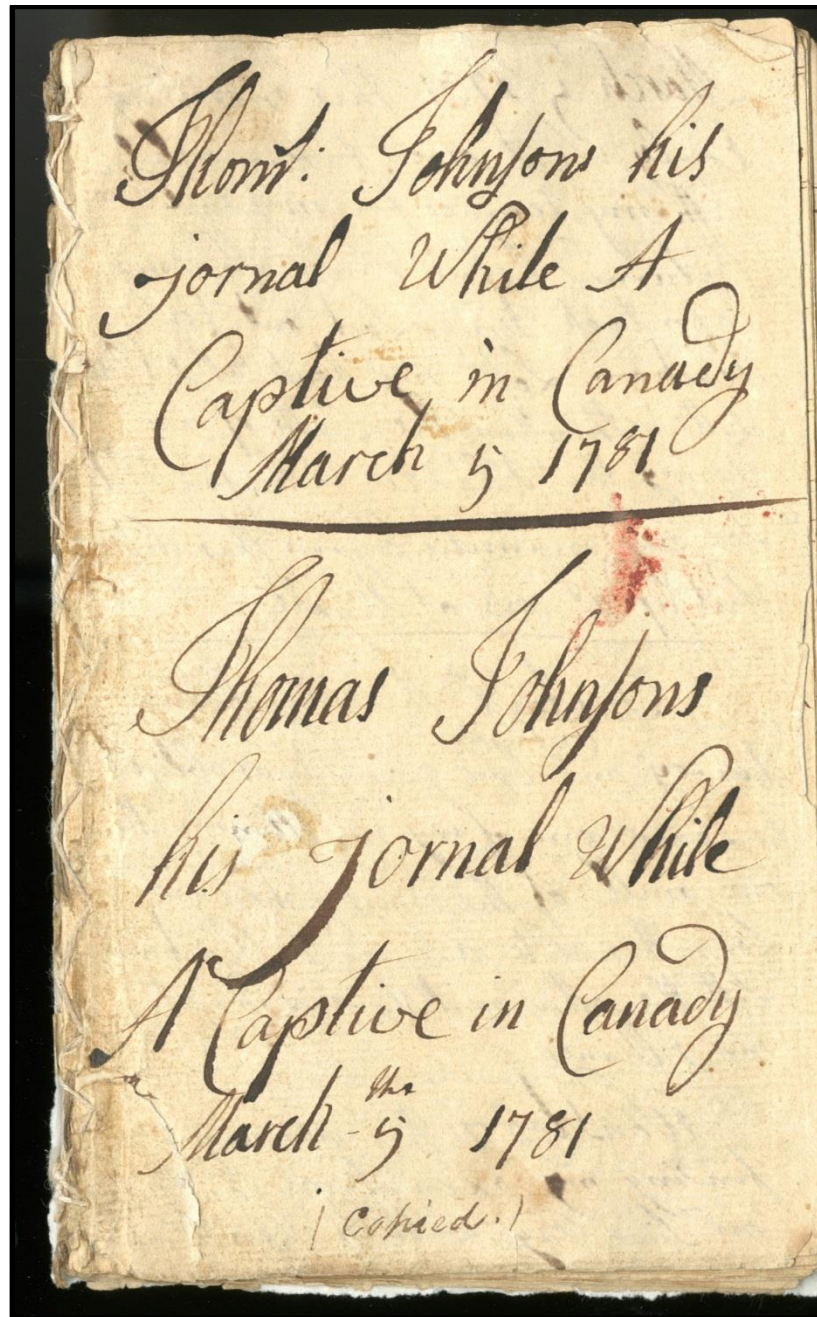


Figure 13: Cover of the journal Thomas Johnson kept while a prisoner in Canada, March 5, 1781-October 12, 1781. This is an early nineteenth-century copy made by Johnson's son, David. Image courtesy of the Vermont Historical Society.

Johnson was lucky to have his worst complaints of imprisonment be loneliness and boredom. He must have been aware, as almost all at the time were, of the atrocious conditions most prisoners faced during the war. The majority of rebel prisoners were held either on the infamous British prison ships in New York Harbor, most notorious of which was the HMS *Jersey*, or the two land-based prisons in England, named Mill and Forton. Together, these three prisons held up to 30,000 Americans—of whom, approximately 11,000 perished during the war.⁴⁵

Prisoners faced many difficulties, with disease ranking the worst. Cramped, poorly ventilated conditions on board the *Jersey* helped spread the smallpox when it broke out in 1782. Knowing prisoners would receive almost no treatment if sick, one proactive patriot prisoner “concluded to act as [his] own physician,” and with only a “common pin” proceeded to inoculated himself by cutting into another infected prisoner and giving himself a weak version of the disease in order to build immunity.⁴⁶

Another difficulty most prisoners faced was in procuring supplies. Prison rations were not enough for healthy living, so the American government hired local agents to purchase and distribute extra supplies for their imprisoned soldiers. These provisions, though, were distributed “according to their ranks and pay in the Continental service.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ The numbers of how many prisoners these three prisons held is from Jesse Lemisch, “Listening to the ‘Inarticulate’: William Widger’s Dream and the Loyalties of American Revolutionary Seamen in British Prisons,” *Journal of Social History* 3, no. 1 (October 1, 1969): 7; Caroline Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor: Service and Sacrifice in George Washington’s Army* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 200. Both sets of numbers are estimates only as the record keeping was done sporadically and of the few records made, even fewer have survived to today.

⁴⁶ Thomas Dring, *Recollections of the Jersey Prison Ship from the Manuscript of Capt. Thomas Dring*, ed. Albert Geen (New York: Corinth Books, 1961), 20.

⁴⁷ Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor*, 2004, 220.

In 1780, Congress allotted only \$6,000 for the imprisoned regular soldiers, while \$45,000 was budgeted for imprisoned officers.

Jonathan Elkin, who was captured on the same expedition as Thomas Johnson, was a victim of some of these atrocious conditions. Elkins did not share Johnson's officer status, and so was sent to a prison in Quebec. Elkins "suffered from hunger," because "only 3 fourths of a pound [of food] was allowed each man, a day.... this we got twice a week, for 3 days & for 4."⁴⁸ Since the food was delivered only every three or four days, the prisoners "carried it under our arm till we eat all up, for if we layed it down we were so hungry someone of us would steal and eat it." In addition to poor food, the prisoners lacked space. They could not leave the room in which they were placed, except if chosen to empty the chamberpots, which was a "privilege we all wished for." Elkins was lucky he was there in August and September and not the winter months, or else his complaints would have increased from the cold and lack of blankets, clothes, and fires. Elkins was shipped from Quebec to Ireland, and then England, where he was sent to Mill Prison. He finally returned home a year and a half after his capture.⁴⁹

The conditions Thomas Johnson faced as a prisoner in Canada were different in many ways from his poorer compatriots. Instead of smallpox-infested ships Johnson wrote to his wife that he "enjoyed the best State of health."⁵⁰ Instead of near-starvation and rotten bread, Johnson dined in the homes of British officers and recorded getting drunk

⁴⁸ Elkins, "Reminiscences of Jonathan Elkins," 205–6.

⁴⁹ Wells, *History of Newbury, VT*, 93; Ernest Ludlow Bogart, *Peacham: The Story of a Vermont Hill Town* (St. Johnsbury, VT: Railroad Street Press, 2010), 52.

⁵⁰ "Letter from Thomas Johnson to Abigail Johnson, August 14, 1781" (Three Rivers, Canada), Johnson Papers DOC 574: 11, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.

on at least three occasions. As an officer and a gentleman, Johnson received all the necessary amenities for a healthy and comfortable lifestyle. For example, in his journal, Johnson recorded having access to a variety of books, from *Don Quixote de la Mancha* to *The History of Tom Jones*.⁵¹ On May 4th, Johnson read *The Tattler* so much that “it hath almost tattled my brains out.”⁵² But, in order for officers to receive such lavish treatment, they had to provide for it themselves. Johnson asked his wife to send him money and supplies, including his “silver watch, stockbuckle, [and] 1 knee buckle.”⁵³ Johnson also borrowed cash from locals, such as Thomas Busby of Montreal, who leant “the sum of Seven Spanish Dollars” to Johnson in 1781.⁵⁴

The better treatment of officers over enlisted men was part of a European military tradition that had been established and honed over centuries. Officer status in the eighteenth-century was a reflection of social class more than merit, and officers often identified more with the leaders of their enemies’ armies than with their own men.⁵⁵ Additionally, giving privileges to officers was self-beneficiary because it was reciprocal; by respecting an adversary’s rank, one hoped to receive the same honored treatment if found captured. This tradition was also a reflection of greater European military culture

⁵¹ Johnson, “Journal of Captivity,” August 6, 1781; September 17, 1781.

⁵² Ibid., May 4, 1781.

⁵³ “Letter from Abigail Johnson to Thomas Johnson, Newbury, July 14, 1781” (Newbury, VT), Johnson Papers, DOC 574: 10, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library; “Letter from William Wallace to Thomas Johnson, July 14, 1781” (Newbury, VT), Johnson Papers DOC 574: 09, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.

⁵⁴ “Receipt from Thomas Busby Jr. to Thomas Johnson, September 25, 1807” (Montreal, Canada), Johnson Papers DOC 574: 69, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.

⁵⁵ John A. Lynn, “League of Gentlemen: Officers of the 17th and 18th Centuries,” *Military History* 29, no. 4 (November 2012): 36–43.

moving towards more humane practices in the early modern era. The writings of the famous Swiss military philosopher, politician, and legalist Emmerich von Vattel reminded commanders to “never forget that our enemies are men.”⁵⁶ Vattel’s military books and pamphlets were widely circulated in various languages all over Europe.

One of the ways in which war could be more humane was in the treatment of prisoners. One of the traditions Vattel outlined in his military pamphlets was parole of officers:

By a custom which equally displays the honour and humanity of the Europeans, an officer, taken prisoner in war, is released on his parole, and enjoys the comfort of passing the time of his captivity in his own country, in the midst of his family; and the party who have thus released him, rest as perfectly sure of him, as if they had him confined in irons.⁵⁷

Like parole, prisoner exchanges were a European military custom carried across the Atlantic. Captured soldiers were traded for similarly ranked soldiers of one’s own army in an effort to minimize slaughter, costs of holding prisoners, and the amount of time spent on recruiting and training new soldiers. However, these customs were seen as privileges based on rules of honor and trust, and therefore only applied to “civilized” peoples. “When we are at war with a savage nation,” Vattel wrote, “who observe no rules, we may punish them in the person of any of their people whom we take.”⁵⁸ The privileges offered by Vattel’s limited warfare, including a distinction between civilians

⁵⁶ Armstrong Starkey, *War in the Age of the Enlightenment, 1700-1789* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 18.

⁵⁷ Emer de Vattel, *The Law of Nations, Or, Principles of the Law of Nature, Applied to the Conduct and Affairs of Nations and Sovereigns, with Three Early Essays on the Origin and Nature of Natural Law and on Luxury*, ed. Bela Kapossy and Richard Whitmore (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2008), 150.

⁵⁸ Starkey, *War in the Age of the Enlightenment, 1700-1789*, 18.

and soldiers, were extended only to those nations recognized as part of the European military culture.

Whether or not the fledgling United States was part of this culture was debated by contemporaries. Some defined the war as a domestic insurrection and that, therefore, England should not extend privileges that were reserved for European states. Another challenge to the Americans' claim to European military culture was their geographical location. Regardless of their European heritage, they were not in Europe, and therefore lacked the status of Europeans in the eyes of many British. These views limited the height of positions colonials could obtain in the British Empire, as well as the general understanding of their relative cultural equality.

Despite the barriers they faced, the colonists certainly identified with their European counterparts. They tried their hardest to be aware of the latest fashions and trends, and purchased all of the items necessary for European refinement.⁵⁹ Even in the frontiers of Vermont colonists decorated themselves with ivory combs, silk, and colored feathers, purchased from small country stores like the one run by Thomas Johnson. They read manner books on European practices of civility, they danced European dances, adopted tea as a staple drink, and discussed the Enlightenment *philosophes*.

The military that was established by the rebel colonists followed these trends in adopting European practices. Many American officers, such as General George Washington, were trained in European-style warfare during the French and Indian War and used that experience to define their civilized American military culture. There were

⁵⁹ For a great book on colonists' and early Americans' active pursuit of European gentility, see: Richard Lyman Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage, 1993).

five practices that Europeans identified with a civilized army: restrained military tactics, the high-birth of officers, military academy training, reading military literature, and the commission of foreign officers.⁶⁰ The rebelling Americans met three out of five of these qualifications. The American Commander in Chief continuously showed restraint in his choice of military tactics, even when pressured by his second-in-command Charles Lee to arm civilians and rely on guerilla warfare, and commissioned many foreign officers, including Von Stueben, Lafayette, and Rochambeau.⁶¹ As for the military literature, the Continental soldiers and American militias were, surprisingly, often more well-read than most of the Europeans who encountered them.⁶² Many comments of shock and admiration were recorded by British and Hessian commanders who captured rebel supply lines and inventoried the numbers of military books that travelled next to powder horns and bullet molds.

⁶⁰ These five practices are a compilation of the descriptions of European military culture found in: Duffy, *Military Experience in the Age of Reason*; Starkey, *War in the Age of the Enlightenment, 1700-1789*; David A. Bell, "Officers, Gentlemen, and Poets," in *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007).

⁶¹ Artemis Ward was technically Washington's second in command, but was sickly and spent the war as a politician and military administrator rather than a commander of field operations. Charles Lee, officially third in command, often had the powers of the second in command because he was on the field with Washington. Lee is a fascinating figure in general, and an enlightening one when contrasted with General George Washington on the issue of creating and showing the respectability of the rebel American army in the eyes of European military culture. Lee hated the "European Plan," and argued that "if the Americans are servilely kept to the European Plan, they will make an Awkward Figure, be laugh'd at as a bad Army by their Enemy, and defeated in every Recontre which depends on Manoeuvres." Instead, he advocated guerrilla warfare, arming civilians, and stricter punishments lent on Loyalists. Lee was court-martialed for disobeying orders and disrespecting the Commander in Chief in 1778. John Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 133–62.

⁶² Sandra L. Powers, "Studying the Art of War: Military Books Known to American Officers and Their French Counterparts during the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century," *The Journal of Military History* 70, no. 3 (July 1, 2006): 781–814.

Americans fell short of the European ideal, however, when it came to military academy training and the social class of their officers. There was nothing they could do about the academies, as there were none established in North America, but Washington certainly advocated taking “none but gentlemen” as officers.⁶³ But, for all his insistence, there just weren’t enough of the traditional gentlemen to go around. The lack of formal nobility in America meant that most officers came from a background of farming, mercantilism, land speculation, and driving horses.⁶⁴

The origins of the American officers may have invited ridicule and disdain from European armies, but the reputation and cultural role of an officer was fully embraced by the Americans.⁶⁵ Thomas Johnson and his peers identified with the European officer class and felt obligated by the code of honor established across the Atlantic. Further, they expected the same privileges as an officer, including parole and exchange.

⁶³ In a 1778 letter to George Baylor, George Washington advised he take “none but gentlemen” as officers in his militia units. Quoted in: Derrick E. Lapp, “Did They Really ‘Take None But Gentlemen’? Henry Hardman, The Maryland Line, and a Reconsideration of the Socioeconomic Composition of the Continental Officer Corps,” *The Journal of Military History* 78, no. 4 (October 2014): 1248.

⁶⁴ Some of the most famous American officers were men from common backgrounds. Nathanael Greene, who was a blacksmith from Rhode Island before the war, started the Revolution as a militia private, but ended as a Major General in the Continental Army. Henry Knox, whose vast breadth of military knowledge came from reading the books he used to sell in Boston, rose to become Chief Artillery Officer early in the war. Daniel Morgan, whose battlefield tactics in the south sped up the end of the war and an American victory, grew up in Virginia driving teams of horses. Mark E. Lender, “The Enlisted Line: The Continental Soldiers of New Jersey” (Rutgers University, 1975); Lapp, “Did They Really ‘Take None But Gentlemen’?” Lender found that 16% of rebel officers from New Jersey came from the state’s middling class. In Maryland, a whopping 25% had less than £200 in total wealth, which was less than half the wealth required to serve in the Maryland state legislature. Compared to European armies – the French in 1780 had 15% of their officer corps from the bourgeois, and in the early-to-mid 1740s only 7% of British officers hailed from the merchant class – the Americans during the Revolutionary War had more common-born officers than their European counterparts. Duffy, *Military Experience in the Age of Reason*, 34.

⁶⁵ Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor*, 2004.

Because of the hybrid-status of American military culture, foreign officers couldn't agree on the status of American officers. Hessian Captain von Ewald was in awe of and wished to emulate the Americans' military readings, but another German officer allowed his soldiers to beat imprisoned American officers because of their lowly prewar vocations.⁶⁶ After Yorktown, Cornwallis refused to recognize Americans' respectable status by refusing to participate in the ceremony of surrender, while his fellow officer Charles O'Hara had no problem in giving the Americans their due. The challenge that American officers presented to European military culture was slowly broadening the definition of what it mean to be a gentleman, but in the meantime, their identity was in flux.

The interpretation of Americans as not-quite-European affected rebel prisoners' ability to be exchanged in the early years of the war. In 1776, British General Howe was reminded by his superiors that he could not "enter into any treaty or agreement with the Rebels for a regular cartel," because of their rebel status. However, it was not long before the rebels held enough British prisoners that the English government realized that something had to be done. Howe was told by Parliament to use his "own discretion" in arranging unofficial exchanges, "without the King's dignity and honour being committed, or His Majesty's name used in any negotiations for the purpose."⁶⁷ It wasn't until 1782 that Parliament formally authorized prisoner exchanges.

⁶⁶ Powers, "Studying the Art of War," 791, 1255; Duffy, *Military Experience in the Age of Reason*, 283.

⁶⁷ Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor*, 2004, 214.

The approval of informal exchanges was in a large part due to the conduct of Continental General George Washington. Washington insisted on the civilized nature of the rebel military and trained his troops based on his experience with the British during the French and Indian War. In addition to bringing in Prussian Baron von Stueben to drill the soldiers in the “European Plan,” as Charles Lee called it, Washington insisted on prisoner exchanges.⁶⁸ Early in the war, Washington wrote British General Thomas Gage to remind him that “Obligations arising from the Rights of Humanity, & Claims of Rank, are universally binding.”⁶⁹ Washington also threatened Gage that if his soldiers were not treated according to the respect of European military culture that

I shall regulate my conduct towards those gentlemen who are or may be in our possession, exactly by the rule you shall observe towards those of ours now in your custody. If severity and hardship mark the line of your conduct, painful as it may be to me, your prisoners will feel its effects. But if kindness and humanity are shown to ours, I shall with pleasure consider those in our hands only as unfortunate, and they shall receive from me that treatment to which the unfortunate are ever entitled.

By the time Johnson was captured in 1781, Washington had procured an informal system of exchanges for long enough that Johnson had justified faith that he would be paroled and then exchanged. Johnson was not confined behind bars while in Canada, but given parole within the British forts and towns to which he was taken. He spent the first three months of his imprisonment going between the forts at Isle aux Noix, where he was the first prisoner free to roam the grounds, and Saint Jean. The next four months Johnson

⁶⁸ Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed*, 154.

⁶⁹ “Letter from George Washington to Thomas Gage, August 11, 1775” (Cambridge, MA, August 11, 1775), Series 3, Library of Congress, Washington Papers, http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mgw3&fileName=mgw3e/gwpage001.db&recNum=3&tempFile=./temp/~ammem_ASXf&filecode=mgw&next_filecode=mgw&prev_filecode=mgw&itemnum=2&ndocs=3; Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor*, 2004, 211–6.

stayed in a French Catholic village named Trios Rivières, or Three Rivers, where his parole terms were generous enough to allow casual strolls on the riverbank, the “corn fields,” the “Grand Hospital,” and to visit the peas, beans, and cucumbers in the “King’s Garden.”⁷⁰ On what may have been a particularly memorable day, Johnson was walking through the Common when he came across two men “walking hand in hand,” who then “stripped off their clothes and knocked on like hearty fellows.”⁷¹

In between strolls amongst the vegetables and love-making, Johnson wrote to his wife with the reason he believed he was still in Canada. He believed that parole at home had not been given to him because of the “repeated breaches of faith of Continental officers [earlier in the war] which other Prisoners must suffer for.”⁷² Because of earlier officers not honoring their oaths, Johnson was not allowed home. Their dishonor made the honor of other American officers, like Johnson, suspect. For the time being, his parole was limited to watching the boats row by on the river, the vegetables grow in the garden, and the unexpected passions of human animals.

Even with his pleasing and entertaining sojourns about town, Johnson was aware of the limits on his freedom and longed to go home. Not only did he miss his family, but his stay in Canada had given him insights he felt would be valuable to his compatriots back in Newbury. His only options were to be given parole at home or to be exchanged.

⁷⁰ Johnson, “Journal of Captivity.”

⁷¹ Ibid., July 1, 1781.

⁷² “Letter from Thomas Johnson to Abigail Johnson, May 20, 1781” (St. John, Canada), Johnson Papers DOC 574: 04, Vermont Historical Society.

Johnson heard as early as May 1781, less than two months after arriving in Canada, that he might be exchanged early that summer.⁷³ When it became apparent this was not the case in mid-August, Johnson wrote that he'd had "Nothing but disappointments for me."⁷⁴ A few days later he heard that "one hundred and fifty Prisoners exchanged and gone over the Lake." He was not one of them. In a letter to his wife, Johnson urged that his friends in Newbury "Do all that is in their Power that I may be Exchanged this fall."⁷⁵ No exchange for Johnson was made while he was in Canada. Instead, Johnson finally saw his home and family again only when his parole was extended to Newbury in the fall of 1781.

On October 5, 1781, Thomas Johnson swore

...my faith and word of honour to his Excellency [British] General Haldimand, whose permission I have obtained to go home, that I shall not Do or Say any thing contrary to his Majesty's Interest or his Government and that whenever required so to do, I shall repair to whatever place his Excellency, or any other his Majesty Commander in Chief in America, shall judge Expedient to order me untill I shall

⁷³ Johnson, "Journal of Captivity," May 9, 1781.

⁷⁴ Ibid., August 18, 1781.

⁷⁵ "Letter from Thomas Johnson to Abigail Johnson, August 14, 1781."

Figure 14: Thomas Johnson's parole oath, given October 5, 1781 in St. John's (St. Jean), Quebec. Parole allowed Johnson to return home, but he technically remained a prisoner and was not allowed to resume his efforts in the rebellion against the British government. His word of honor was the only piece of trust on which this set-up hinged.

be legally exchanged and Such other person as Shall be agreed upon Sent in my place.⁷⁶

For the opportunity to return home, Johnson agreed to keep open communication with the British command in Canada and to refrain from actively helping the rebel cause. Until he was officially exchanged, he had to follow these rules or else be subject to a recall to Canada, where he could face imprisonment in an actual prison for not keeping his word. Additionally, Johnson's honor reflected upon the whole group of rebels, as he had learned when parole at home was originally denied him because of the misbehavior of earlier prisoners. A lot was riding on his identity as an honorable gentleman.

⁷⁶ Thomas Johnson, "Thomas Johnson's Parole Oath" (St. John, Canada, October 5, 1781), George Washington Papers, 1741-1799: Series 4. General Correspondence. 1697-1799, Library of Congress.

Johnson's family was glad of his return, which occurred on October 12, 1781. They had experienced many hardships while he was gone: the wheat in their fields was killed by a winter frost and their grass much eaten by worms; fifteen year old John, Thomas's eldest, was sick for a long time "with the fevour;" Johnson's costs in Canada had necessitated borrowing expensive loans from merchants in Glasgow; and a daughter, named Hannah, had joined the world and turned one month old without ever meeting her father. Even with all of the activity and expenses, Johnson's family never wanted him to come home under less than honorable circumstances. In July, Abigail Johnson wrote to her husband that she wished "for your Returne as soon as may be with honor."⁷⁷ Thirteen-year-old Moses repeated his mother's sentiments when he wrote to his father that he "Want much to see you and hope you will git home as Soon as you Can Get away with honour." Moses also wanted to show his father his own genteel status, so formally addressed his letter to "Honored Sire," and signed it "your Dutiful Son til Death."

Life could not return to normal, though. Johnson-the-son-of-liberty, could no more defend the revolution because of the oath given by Johnson-the-gentleman. His social class, which provided him options during his confinement in Canada, severely limited his activity once he returned home. Johnson spent the next year seeking a prisoner exchange and his full freedom in order to continue his participation in the rebellion. He proceeded all the way up the chain of command to General George Washington, pleading

⁷⁷ "Letter from Abigail Johnson to Thomas Johnson, Newbury, July 14, 1781"; "Letter from Moses Johnson to Thomas Johnson, Newbury, VT, July 13, 1781" (Newbury, VT), Johnson Papers, DOC 574: 08, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.

for action on his behalf. However, Washington responded that due to “unhappy circumstances” all exchanges were “cut off.”⁷⁸

Though the rebel’s triumph in Yorktown in October 1781 ultimately sealed their victory in the war, it was not such a decisive event for Johnson’s contemporaries, and the danger along the Canadian border was perceived to still be very high. Johnson felt that the knowledge he obtained of the British operations in Canada while a prisoner there, was pertinent to the cause of the revolution if only he could make it known without breaking his oath. He believed that if he were exchanged, he would be free of his parole oath and able to help the rebels while maintaining his honor. In a letter to George Washington, Johnson wrote “I entreat your Excellency, that if it be possible, by a regular exchange, I may be enabled to give all the intelligence in my power without hazarding my character.”⁷⁹ In another letter Johnson told Washington that “I Find myself under the greatest Nesesaty of breacking over the Common Rules of Honour in giving your Exclancey The inclosed accounts while a Prisner on Parole.”⁸⁰

Johnson was so impatient to help Washington’s war that he was willing to tarnish his reputation as a gentleman. One of the reasons he was willing to go to such extremes was that he had reason to believe that Vermont was about to fall to the British, with the

⁷⁸ George Washington, “Letter from George Washington to Thomas Johnson, June 14, 1782,” in *The Granite Monthly*, vol. LII (Harlan C. Pearson, 1920), 358.

⁷⁹ “Letter from Thomas Johnson to George Washington, May 30, 1782” (Newbury, VT), Johnson Papers DOC 574: 21, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.

⁸⁰ “Letter from Thomas Johnson to George Washington, c.1782,” Johnson Papers DOC 574: 23, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.

help of some “infernal villains.”⁸¹ The status of Vermont was undecided, and Johnson felt that its fate lay on his shoulders.

⁸¹ ““Letter from Thomas Johnson to George Washington, September 20, 1782” (Atkinson, NH, n.d.), Johnson Papers DOC 574: 22, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.

CHAPTER TWO

Thomas Johnson: Vermonter

Four miles of marching through cold snow on the night of his capture helped Thomas Johnson decide to make “the best of a Bad bargain.”¹ Whether for his own benefit, the potential benefit for rebel intelligence, or, what is most likely, for both, he decided to ingratiate himself with his captors. Johnson approached the British Captain that very night and offered friendship. He claimed that he was not a passionate rebel, as he had done “Little or Nothing” in the war for the past three years. He also asserted that he and his neighbors were “Tiard of the war,” and just “wanted to injoy their Small intrists with Peace,” but that by “Sending Scouts and Indons on the Peasabel inhabitance,” the British drove them “to take up arnes to Defend them Selves.” Otherwise, Johnson claimed, the residents of Newbury were “good Subjects to the king.” Further, Johnson was anxious to find out “all the Proceedings with Vermont” and Canada and knew that “the only way to git the Secret was to Pretend that I wanted” a union between Vermont and Canada. Johnson’s testimony led the British Captain to say that Johnson was “just such a man as he wanted” for the British intelligence network.

Johnson had reason to believe such talk would be welcomed by the British soldiers for two reasons. First, he was familiar with many of his captors.² The man in charge, Captain Azariah Pritchard, was not known to Johnson personally, but his name

¹ “Thomas Johnson’s Account of His Espionage & Intelligence Activities, C. February-May 1782” n.d., Johnson Papers DOC 574: 19, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.

² Hazel C. Mathews, *Frontier Spies: The British Secret Service, Northern Department, During the Revolutionary War* (Ace Press, 1971), 74, 107.

was probably familiar. Pritchard was a Loyalist from Connecticut who fled to Canada in 1777 after narrowly being acquitted in a military tribunal for passing information to the British. Other men, though, Johnson knew by face and name. Three of the scouts under Pritchard were from Newbury. Levi Sylvester and Abner Barlow were both captured, at different times, by British troops while out hunting in the northern Vermont woods. They enlisted with the British as scouts to avoid the type of imprisonment Jonathan Elkins later received. Barlow, at least, planned on escaping the first chance he got, but was kept under such a watchful eye that he never initiated an attempt.³ Levi Sylvester grew up in Newbury as the son of one of Jacob Bayley's neighbors. In Jonathan Elkins' reminisces, he claimed his father, the Deacon Elkins, was acquainted with "several of the enemy" the night Jonathan was captured with Johnson.⁴ Johnson recorded in his journal that he recognized the faces of Barlow and another man named John Gibson with "great surprise" when they took their first rest at sunrise on March 8th.⁵ Just as Johnson was familiar with some of the newly recruited British troops, they were familiar with him. They were familiar with his gentleman status and, thus, his reliability and trustworthiness.

Additionally, Johnson was offering them something that he suspected they wanted. Vermont's claim to its land was tenuous, as the land was also claimed by the state of New York. Because of New York's claim, the jurisdiction of Vermont was not

³ Barlow's intent to escape is according to Elkins. Elkins, "Reminiscences of Jonathan Elkins," 195–6, 199–201. It was not uncommon for rebel POWs to defect to the British with the intention of escaping back to the patriots. This is discussed further in chapter three.

⁴ Ibid., 193.

⁵ Johnson, "Journal of Captivity," March 8, 1781.

recognized by the United States Continental Congress. The British tried to take advantage of Vermont's vulnerability by offering recognition of Vermont's independence. Secret negotiations of a peace and union began in 1780 between British leaders in Canada and some of the leaders of Vermont. However, by the spring of 1781, the negotiations had advanced very little, due in part to disunity within Vermont. This disunity was in many ways characterized by the split between residents east and west of the Green Mountains, but its roots were laid decades earlier, during the foundation of towns, like Newbury, granted by New Hampshire Royal Governor Benning Wentworth. What became Vermont began as a part of New Hampshire and then New York, before finally becoming its own largely unrecognized entity. The ever-changing jurisdiction of power over colonial and revolutionary Vermont meant that its residents split their identities and loyalties many ways: between New York, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Great Britain.

On January 3, 1749, New Hampshire Royal Governor Benning Wentworth issued a charter for a town named after himself located forty miles west of the Connecticut River. Bennington was the first of 129 town charters Wentworth granted over the next fifteen years in what later became Vermont. Most of these towns were chartered in the immediate years after the French and Indian War; 1763-1764. Even though these towns were beyond the Connecticut River, the traditionally accepted western boundary of New Hampshire, Wentworth claimed that there was precedent in the redrafted border between



Figure 15: New Hampshire Royal Governor Benning Wentworth (1696-1770). Wentworth issued over 100 grants for towns in present-day Vermont, even though New York also claimed the land. This led to decades of debate and hostilities over the legal ownership of the land. Thomas Johnson's hometown of Newbury was one of the New Hampshire Grants issued Wentworth in 1763. Painting by Joseph Blackburn (1750). Image courtesy of the New Hampshire Historical Society.

New York and Connecticut, which put a New England colony in charge of land within twenty miles of the Hudson River, and in the fact that the British government had put New Hampshire in charge of Fort Drummer, located west of the river, during the French and Indian War. To give opportunity to land-hungry settlers, such as Jacob Bayley and Thomas Johnson, and to get rich from land speculation himself, Wentworth claimed the land east of the Hudson River for New Hampshire.

New York's colonial government was furious. They claimed sole ownership to the land between the Hudson and Connecticut Rivers north of Massachusetts.⁶ Immediately after Wentworth issued his first disputed town charter, New York turned to the royal government across the Atlantic to clear up the matter. In 1753, while awaiting a royal decision, and somewhat put off by the raids between New England and Canada, Wentworth stopped issuing town charters. The crown remained silent, however, so Wentworth resumed the town-making business in 1760, after most of the fighting had ended on the North American front of the Seven Years War. Finally in 1764, the king's Board of Trade resolved the colonial border dispute by claiming the western banks of the Connecticut River "to be the Boundary Line" between the two colonies. New Hampshire lost, and the towns and peoples living between the Hudson and Connecticut Rivers were now under the authority of New York, including those who lived in Newbury. According to the crown, Thomas Johnson was now a New Yorker.

London's involvement did not settle the question of what to do about the land claims of the towns already growing west of the Connecticut River, though, and New

⁶ For the New Hampshire/New York colonial dispute over Vermont, see Sherman, Sessions, and Potash, *Freedom and Unity*, 73–81.

York did not welcome them with open arms. Right after the royal decree, New York began issuing charters for the very lands that had already been granted and settled under New Hampshire direction. Many northern frontier settlers likely would have passed peaceably into New York jurisdiction had it not been for the failure of New York to acknowledge the claim the settlers had over property rights of their land. Their claims, which they believed were made not just through government-issued grants, but by the time they'd spent living there and improving the land, however, were not recognized.

There were also many differences between the New York and New England ways of life that made the transition difficult. New England colonies tended to offer widespread land ownership, a government based on town meetings and high suffrage rates, and a high degree of social, financial, and geographical mobility, including ease and frequency of property sales. New York, however, was based on a manorial system, where only the few wealthiest owned land and voted. The New York courts also made selling land difficult, which limited social and geographical mobility. Additionally, earlier border disputes between other New England colonies and New York had already created a hostile environment for the northern New Englanders who suddenly found themselves part of New York. For example, New York large landowner and later signer of the Declaration of Independence, Lewis Morris, called the people of New England full of "low craft and cunning... which is so interwoven in their Constitutions that all their art cannot disguise it from the World."⁷ Anne Grant, the daughter of a distinguished British military officer who was granted by New York some of the land in Vermont after 1764,

⁷ Ibid., 79–80.

dismissed New Englanders as “conceited...litigious...vulgar, insolent.” Prejudices, differences in land culture, and property disputes formed the basis of what was essentially a civil war between the Hudson and Connecticut Rivers between 1764 and 1777.

In June of 1766, New York ordered all of the New Hampshire grants to apply for New York titles, which cost £14 per 1,000 acres, within three months in order to be recognized. Most residents of the Grants found this insulting, inconvenient, and costly. An unofficial group of representatives got together and sent Samuel Robinson of Bennington to London to plead their case before the king. With the help of an English representative from Connecticut and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, Robinson elicited from the king an order for New York to stop the applications and land grants in the disputed territory until further orders were given once the matter had been looked into more thoroughly. Like the earlier conflict between New Hampshire and New York, though, England was slow in coming to a decision. For two years New York waited, but in 1769, they resumed the applications and the distribution of grants for land that was already settled by New Englanders.

In the western Grants, the Green Mountain Boys formed in late 1770 to oppose any enforcement of New York’s authority, by force if necessary. Under the leadership of Ethan Allen and Seth Warner, the Green Mountain Boys was a quasi-military organization that threatened those loyal to New York with public ridicule, whippings, and



Figure 16: Statue of Ethan Allen outside the Vermont State House in Montpelier, VT. Allen was one of the leaders of the Green Mountain Boys, an organization dedicated to resisting New York authority in the New Hampshire Grants. He was also a leader of the Bennington Party, a political group aligned with the interests of the Green Mountain Boys. Starting in 1781, Allen participated in secret negotiations between Vermont and the British in Canada. He remains today the most celebrated public hero of Vermont. This statue is a 1941 copy of the original one made by Larkin Mead in 1858-61. Photo taken by author. (February 2015).



Figure 17: Dr. Samuel Adams was hoisted to the top of the Bennington tavern as punishment for acknowledging New York's jurisdiction over the New Hampshire Grants. His punishment was carried out by the Green Mountain Boys. This woodcut was originally printed in Zadock Thompson's Civil History of Vermont (1842). Image courtesy of the Vermont Historical Society.

house burnings. In July 1771, the Green Mountain Boys gathered on the farm of James Breakenridge and successfully defended Breakenridge against an eviction to be carried out by a New York sheriff's posse. The following spring they captured Hugh Munro, a man who was surveying lands for a New York land owner, and administered several whippings before chasing him back to New York. In the fall of 1773, Allen and his men made Benjamin Spencer, a Grant resident who was sympathetic to New York's jurisdiction, watch his neighbors' homes burn as a warning. In one of the more well known incidences, Dr. Samuel Adams of Arlington was tied to a chair and raised to the top of a signpost and left there for hours. The Green Mountain Boys justified their actions with righteous rhetoric, saying they were defending "the numerous families settled upon the land," and that they had to fight back against the "Cunning of New York" or "be by terms inslav'd."⁸

The threatening and violent tactics of the Green Mountain Boys were not supported by all in the Grants, however. Generally, those east of the Green Mountains, perhaps because they were further from the abuse of New York agents, did not approve of the illegal and violent choices made under Allen's leadership. In Newbury, Jacob Bayley criticized Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys for being "avowed enemies to the cause of Christ."⁹ Instead of resisting through violence, the leaders of Newbury

⁸ Ibid., 84. For an account of the Green Mountain Boy's early years, and their fights against New York, see Ibid., 84-91.

⁹ Allen was a public Deist and in 1784 published a Deist pamphlet entitled *Reason: the Only Oracle of Man*. Bayley is quoted from a 1771 letter by him to Eleazor Wheelock, printed in: Edwin Allen Bayley, "An Address Commemorative of the Life and Public Services of Brig.-Gen. Jacob Bayley, 1726-1815 : A Founder of the State of Vermont, A Neglected Patriot of the Revolution." (Capital City Press, 1919), 13, University of Vermont Bailey-Howe Library's Special Collections.

decided to solve their displeasure by a way that they thought was more becoming of gentlemen: politics. As soon as they heard of the king's 1764 decision in favor of New York over New Hampshire, the proprietors of Newbury voted "To send Agents to New York to acknowledge their jurisdiction."¹⁰ Jacob Bayley was one of three sent. In New York, Bayley gained the favor of influential men like Henry Clinton, who assured him that Newbury could obtain a charter with favorable conditions, including the recognition of personal property and land already settled. Bayley returned to Newbury so that the town proprietors could vote on the matter, but it appears that they were undecided for some time. The leaders of Newbury spent the next seven years looking to both New Hampshire and New York at the same time, trying to figure out in which party it was safest to trust their property holdings.

Bayley described the delicacy of negotiating with two political sides in a letter to a friend on January 15, 1771: "I am writing Governor Wentworth on the affair, but what shall I write! If I appear active for New Hampshire, where is my credit in New York! If that sinks..." then Newbury would suffer if New York won the conflict.¹¹ The recipient of Bayley's letter was Eleazor Wheelock, president of Dartmouth College in nearby Hanover, NH. Wheelock was closer to the New Hampshire governor than Bayley, and acted as a sort of middle man for correspondence between Newbury and the New Hampshire royal government. On January 31, 1771, New Hampshire Governor John Wentworth, who had succeeded to his uncle's position in 1767, wrote to Wheelock that

¹⁰ From the May 1, 1765 town meeting records, quoted in Wells, *History of Newbury, VT*, 52.

¹¹ Bayley, "An Address Commemorative of Jacob Bayley," 13.

since New York had just received a new royal governor, William Tryone, dissatisfied Grant towns, such as Newbury, might successfully petition to Tryone to be part of New Hampshire. Wentworth promised his support on the matter.

With the strength of the New Hampshire Governor behind him, Jacob Bayley circulated a petition in March 1771 for Newbury's reannexation into New Hampshire. In August, Governor Wentworth visited Jacob Bayley in the latter's home in Newbury, again promising his support in Newbury's cause. However, Bayley received a letter from the Governor in October that advised Bayley that he "must make the best terms I could with New York for he [Wentworth] could do no more to help me toward getting into the Province of New Hampshire."¹² Bayley was so "surprised and disturbed" by this about-face that he immediately set out for Portsmouth, NH to demand an explanation. He was denied a meeting with Wentworth, however. Later, Bayley found out that sometime between August and October 1771, when Wentworth had promised to help Bayley and then denied his support, New York had promised to honor all of the land granted to the Wentworths under the New Hampshire charters in exchange for Wentworth withdrawing his support from Connecticut River towns like Newbury. Wentworth recognized a good deal when he saw one.

Now on their own, the men of Newbury voted on November 20, 1771 to send Jacob Bayley and two others back to New York to purchase the titles to their lands. On their way to Albany, the representatives visited the leaders of the Bennington Party, the political party united with the Green Mountain Boys, and urged them to also join New

¹² Quoted from a letter by Jacob Bayley to Asa Benton. Published in: *Ibid.*, 14.

York. Bayley told Ethan Allen that the Grants were too remote and small to win the fight. His advice went unheeded, however. In Albany, Bayley presented the designated fees and a petition for a new charter for Newbury to the New York Assembly on February 6, 1772. On February 19th Newbury was officially recognized by New York.

Many other Grant towns east of the Green Mountains followed similar paths as Newbury in recognizing New York's jurisdiction over them. The northern half of these towns, including Newbury, were organized as New York's Gloucester County in 1770 and appointments were made for the county's bureaucracy and defense. Jacob Bayley was appointed a judge for the county courts until 1775.¹³ At the outbreak of the American Revolution, as Newbury passed from being under the jurisdiction of royal New York to the jurisdiction of New York State, militias were organized in the Grant towns. Thomas Johnson's first commission, as Captain of the local militia, was officially under the authority of New York State. In 1776, New York appointed Jacob Bayley as Brigadier General of Gloucester & Cumberland Counties, which effectively placed him as the military leader of all of the Grants east of the Green Mountains.¹⁴ Bayley also headed the Committee of Safety for the northern Connecticut Valley, which acted as a shadow government in direct defiance to the local royal governments, and whose headquarters Bayley located in Newbury.¹⁵

¹³ Ibid., 18.

¹⁴ Sherman, Sessions, and Potash, *Freedom and Unity*, 99–100.

¹⁵ Bayley, "An Address Commemorative of Jacob Bayley," 19.

Despite the differences between the Bennington Party and Jacob Bayley, both aligned with the rebels during the American Revolution. The Green Mountain Boy's rhetoric for the right to resist and for just government transferred easily to the larger rebel cause. In May 1775, Ethan Allen led a group of Green Mountain Boys, partnered with Colonel Benedict Arnold, in a surprise capture of British-held Fort Ticonderoga, on the other side of Lake Champlain. In 1776, the Continental Congress authorized the Green Mountain Boys as a regular unit of the Continental Army.¹⁶

The Bennington Party, however, was not willing to give up their local fight in preference for the larger American cause. They continued their struggle against New York while they fought for the thirteen original colonies at the same time. Three months before the skirmishes at Lexington and Concord, the western party called a convention to meet in Manchester. The intention of the 1775 Manchester Convention was to organize the New Hampshire Grants as an independent state, as neither New York nor New Hampshire. Neither Barely nor anyone from east of the Green Mountains attended, though, and nobody from Newbury openly supported the move that they thought was premature and reckless.¹⁷ In January of 1776, another convention was called, this time in Dorset. The delegates in Dorset voted to send a representative to the Continental Congress with a petition that the Grants be recognized as an independent, fourteenth state. The Philadelphia Congress denied the petition, however, because it lacked the support of the towns east of the Green Mountains. One Congressional delegate advised

¹⁶ Sherman, Sessions, and Potash, *Freedom and Unity*, 94–7.

¹⁷ Bayley, “An Address Commemorative of Jacob Bayley,” 18.

that their independence would never be recognized unless they “unite the whole of the inhabitants of said Grants together.”¹⁸

The mood in the eastern Grants began to change in late 1776, though, as the Allens’ separation movement increased its political organization and decreased its violence. Perhaps the advice from the Congressional delegate gave the easterners hope that recognized independence could be attained. Just as he had led Newbury in negotiations with both New York and New Hampshire a decade earlier, as of late 1777 Bayley started participating in Vermont independence conventions while still holding appointments from New York. Newbury sent representatives to a convention in Westminster held on January 15, 1777. The Newbury representatives included Jacob Bayley and thirty-four year old Thomas Johnson. Johnson and Bayley debated and adopted, with the other representatives, a Declaration of Independence of the New Hampshire Grants, which outlined “the right the inhabitants of said New-Hampshire grants have, to form themselves into a separate and independent state, or government.” The Westminster Convention also wrote out a petition to send to Philadelphia, so that “the said declaration may be received, and the district described therein be ranked by your honors, among the free and independent American states, and delegates therefrom admitted to seats in the grand Continental Congress.”¹⁹

It was not enough for the eastern and western Grants to unite, though. Their independence was opposed by the Congressional delegates from New York because of

¹⁸ Sherman, Sessions, and Potash, *Freedom and Unity*, 99.

¹⁹ “Vermont’s Declaration of Independence” (Second Vermont Republic: The Green Mountain Self-Determination Movement, 1777), <http://vermontrepublic.org/vermonts-declaration-of-independence-1777/>.

their clashing land claims. Additionally, the southern states feared that admitting another northern state would swing the political balance against them and so they joined in New York's opposition. The Grant's petition for independence was denied.

Without the support of the Continental Congress, Newbury and other eastern towns may have returned to New York's authority peaceably, had the New York Constitutional Convention not adjourned on April 20, 1777. The New York state constitution was not submitted to its citizens prior to ratification, but the pro-separatist party in the Grants made sure to circulate copies around the Green Mountains. The constitution allowed for only two to four representatives from each of the three Grant counties, whereas many other New York counties received seven to ten representatives each. Collectively, the Grants had even less representation than Albany County had alone. Additionally, the constitution allowed for the governor to dismiss the assembly, gave life tenure to judges, and required high property holdings as qualification to vote. To New Englanders, who enjoyed relatively widespread suffrage and large amounts of power in the hands of the common voters, these terms seemed contrary to the point of the American Revolution. James Bayley wrote the to the New York Assembly on June 14, 1777 that "the people before they saw your constitution were not willing to trouble themselves with a separation from New York, but now, almost to a man, are violently for it."²⁰

The voters of Newbury officially called for independence on June 23, 1777. On July 2nd, town representatives from all over the Grants, including Jacob Bayley on behalf

²⁰ Bayley, "An Address Commemorative of Jacob Bayley," 100; Wells, *History of Newbury, VT*, 109; Sherman, Sessions, and Potash, *Freedom and Unity*, 100.

of Newbury, sat for another convention, this time in Windsor. Taking precedent from a Continental Congress resolution passed on May 15, 1776, that stated that “if no government sufficient to... their affairs has been established, [they] can adopt a government that shall best represent the people,” the Windsor delegates drafted a constitution for their own independent state, and named the state Vermont.²¹ They highlighted their differences from New York by eliminating property requirements for suffrage, outlawing adult slavery, and giving each town equal representation in the legislature.

Disunity still existed in the former Grants, though. During the spring of 1779, a contingent of south-eastern Vermont citizens rebelled against the authority of the Vermont Republic, in favor of New York’s leadership. With the support of New York Governor George Clinton, they released their oppositions’ cows in protest of the fines they received for refusing to fight in the Vermont militia.²² Vermont Governor Thomas Chittenden, formerly of the Bennington Party, sent Ethan Allen with troops to arrest the rioters. When New York failed to send assistance, the rebellion was quelled.

Just who could be part of the new Vermont Republic was also a point of contention. Sixteen New Hampshire towns on the eastern banks of the Connecticut River petitioned the Vermont Assembly for entry into the new state. They were dissatisfied with New Hampshire’s population-based proportional legislative representation and were attracted to the one vote per town strategy across the river. Also, many of these towns

²¹ Sherman, Sessions, and Potash, *Freedom and Unity*, 101.

²² The fee that they were protesting was equivalent to the cost of one cow, so releasing cows seemed a relevant protest at the time. *Ibid.*, 112.

were founded in conjunction with a western counterpart, just as Newbury and Haverhill were established together in 1763. The sixteen New Hampshire towns were known as the Eastern Union, and with the help of Jacob Bayley, the Vermont Assembly approved their acceptance on June 11, 1778. New Hampshire and the United States were shocked at the audacity of the Vermonters, and they were not the only ones. Many on the western side of the Green Mountains, including Governor Chittenden, feared that the acceptance of the Eastern Union would destroy the current balance of political power between the eastern and western sides of the state. More eastern towns would mean a clear eastern majority in the state legislature. Chittenden sent Ethan Allen to the Continental Congress to apologize for “the Imbecility of Vermont.”²³ Allen returned to Vermont and advised that unless they retracted the union with the New Hampshire towns, “the whole power of the confederacy of America will join to annihilate the state of Vermont.” In light of this threat, the Assembly repealed their acceptance of the Eastern Union on October 21, 1778. Jacob Bayley and twenty-four of his supporters stormed out of the session in protest.

Congress continued to deny recognition of Vermont throughout the Revolutionary War, even though it gladly used Vermont men in its war against the British.²⁴ The opposition from New York and the southern states outweighed the wishes of the Vermonters in Philadelphia negotiations. Congress did attempt to curtail the stress Vermont was inflicting upon the union, though. In June of 1779, two Congressional

²³ Ethan Allen, quoted in *Ibid.*, 111.

²⁴ Not only did Vermont men serve in the United States Continental Army as part of the New York regiments, but American defenses relied on Vermont militias to respond to Burgoyne’s campaign down Lake Champlain in 1777. These units were recognized by the United States as units of New York, even the Green Mountain Boys unit under Seth Warner, despite its well-known and very public anti-Yorker origin.

delegates were sent to Vermont to attempt a compromise between the Green Mountain State and New York.²⁵ They put an offer before Governor Chittenden that gave full recognition of all the Grant town charters and private property in exchange for returning to the control of New York. The separation movement had come too far for Chittenden to relinquish power now, though, and he refused the offer. Vermont, he believed, could weather the wrath of Congress and hold out for better terms.

Chittenden lost patience waiting for the United States to determine the fate of Vermont and decided to move in a new and shocking direction. In September of 1780 Chittenden sent two representatives to Congress, one of which was Ira Allen, to warn the congressional delegates that if Vermont was not going to be admitted into the United States, then the Vermonters were “at liberty to offer, or accept, terms of cessation of hostilities with Great-Britain,” or even to accept a return to the British Empire.²⁶ Historians are split on whether or not Chittenden actually intended to ally with England or if he was just bluffing, but he certainly executed action in line with the threat.²⁷ In fact,

²⁵ Sherman, Sessions, and Potash, *Freedom and Unity*, 113.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ The negotiations that were carried on between Revolutionary Vermont leaders and the British in Canada during the 1780s, known as the Haldimand Negotiations or the Haldimand Affair, has been a controversial subject for historians over time. The earliest histories venerated the Allens and Governor Chittenden and argued that they were not treasonous to the United States, but negotiated with the British as a bluff to establish some peace in the north. Some of these historians include: Rowland E. Robinson’s *Vermont a Study of Independence* (1892), Henry Hall’s *Ethan Allen: The Robin Hood of Vermont* (1892), and Lafayette Wilbur’s *Early History of Vermont: 4 Volumes* (1899-1903). Even after British archives were accessible to American historians, and the Haldimand Papers collection was researched, Walter Hill Crockett’s *Vermont: The Green Mountain State: 5 Volumes* (1921-1923) still maintained the American patriotism of Vermont leaders. The first historian to argue that the Allens and Chittenden were genuine in seeking a union with Great Britain was Clarence W. Rife in his 1922 Yale PhD dissertation, *Vermont and Great Britain: A Study in Diplomacy, 1779-1783*. For the next seventy or so years, revisionists dominated the topic, with the exception of Frederic F. Van de Water’s *The Reluctant Republic* (1941) and a couple of popular biographies on the Allen brothers (James B. Wilbur’s *Ira Allen: Founder of Vermont, 1751-1814*

according to Ethan Allen, Vermont had “an indubitable right to agree on Terms of Cessation of Hostilities with Great Britain.”²⁸

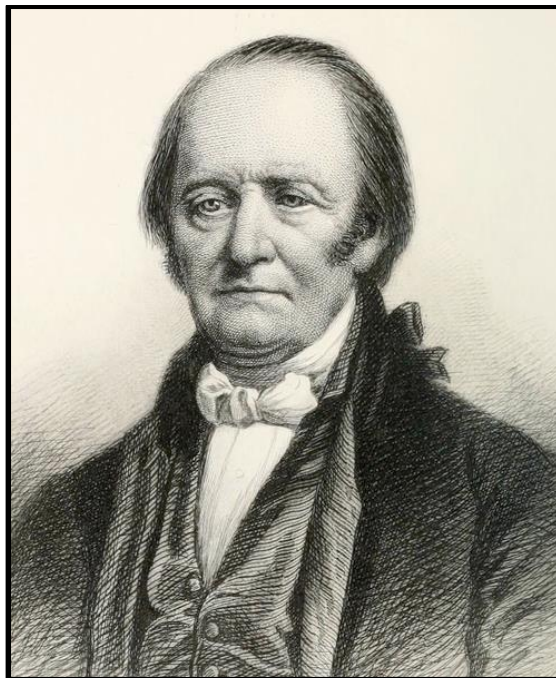
Secret negotiations between Vermont and Canada began when Ethan Allen met with Justus Sherwood, head of British Intelligence for the Northern Department, that fall. Sherwood and Allen had been intimately acquainted long before this clandestine encounter. Sherwood, originally from Connecticut, moved to western Vermont in 1771 and there he joined in the efforts of the Green Mountain Boys to assert their property rights against New York authority. For Sherwood, however, the rhetoric of the Green

(1928) and John Pell's *Ethan Allen* (1929)). In 1939 Matt Bushnell Jones looked at the economic motivations behind Vermont independence in *Vermont in the Making, 1750-1777*, an angle that was continued by Chilton Williamson's *Vermont in Quandary: 1763-1825* (1949) and Nicholas Muller's *Commercial History of the Lake Champlain-Richelieu River Route: 1760-1815* (1968). Jones', Williamson's, and Muller's works strongly supported the revisionist view of the Vermont leaders and the Haldimand Negotiations. The first biography of Ethan Allen to argue that Allen was serious about negotiations with the British was Charles Jellison's *Ethan Allen: Frontier Rebel* (1969). By the 1990s, the traditionalists had regrouped, arguing that the Vermont leaders were only negotiating with the British to press the United States' Congress into accepting Vermont as a state. This view is taken in Michael Bellesiles' *Revolutionary Outlaws: Ethan Allen and the Struggle for Independence on the Early American Frontier* (1993) and Willard Sterne Randall's *Ethan Allen: His Life and Times* (2011). John J. Duffy and Nicholas Muller investigate the changing perceptions over time of Allen in the Haldimand Negotiations in *Inventing Ethan Allen* (2014). Some of the most detailed accounts of the Haldimand Negotiations come from Canadian historians: Hazel C. Mathews' *Frontier Spies: The British Secret Service, Northern Department, during the Revolutionary War* (1971), Gavin K. Watts' *A Dirty Trifling Piece of Business* (2009) and *I am Heartily Ashamed* (2010), and David Bennett's *A Few Lawless Vagabonds: Ethan Allen, the Republic of Vermont, and the American Revolution* (2014). As Canadian historians, their works may not be accurately called “revisionist” (since there is nothing in their nation's historiography to revise regarding the issue), but they certainly fall in line with American revisionists in analyzing the intent of the Vermont leaders. Whether revisionist or traditionalist, though, all historians up to now (perhaps with the exception of Watts) have highly revolved around Ethan Allen as the agent of change for Vermont, not only to the relative exclusion of other well-known men, such as Ira Allan and Thomas Chittenden, who actually spent more time at the negotiating table, but also to the complete exclusion of other lesser-known characters, such as Thomas Johnson. Because of the limited focus of Vermonters involved, all of these accounts portray the Haldimand Negotiations as a rather contained affair, with few participants. As Thomas Johnson's case shows, with many of his neighbors being used as messengers and informants, and others influencing the affair through their opposition, this simply was not the case. The Haldimand Affair was much more widespread amongst the Vermont population than has previously been acknowledged.

²⁸ Sherman, Sessions, and Potash, *Freedom and Unity*, 114.

Mountain Boys did not easily transfer to the patriotic cause and a few years later he found himself arrested by his former comrades for harboring Loyalist views. In 1777, the former Green Mountain Boy escaped to Canada, where he joined the Queen's Loyal Rangers. After the British defeat at Saratoga, Sherwood helped the British cause by interrogating loyalists and prisoners-of-war on the conditions and strategies of the rebellious colonies. In October 1780 Canadian General Governor Frederick Haldimand appointed Sherwood as commissioner in charge of prisoner exchanges with Vermont. While Sherwood did exchange prisoners, that business was also a cover for his primary duty – to negotiate Vermont's reunion with Great Britain.²⁹

Since Chittenden was Governor of the Vermont Republic, the negotiations held official weight, but they lacked the more general approval of the state legislature. Knowing that they would not be approved by most Vermonters, Allen denied his



²⁹ Mathews, *Frontier Spies*, 43–6.

Figure 18: Thomas Chittenden (1730-1797). Along with the Allen brothers, Chittenden was one of the leading political figures in the western Grants and initiated the move towards the independence of Vermont from New York. Chittenden also served as the first Governor of the independent Vermont Republic, and was involved, indirectly, in the secret negotiations between Vermont and the British in Canada. Image was originally published in Records of the Council of Safety and Governor and Council of the State of Vermont Volume I (1873).

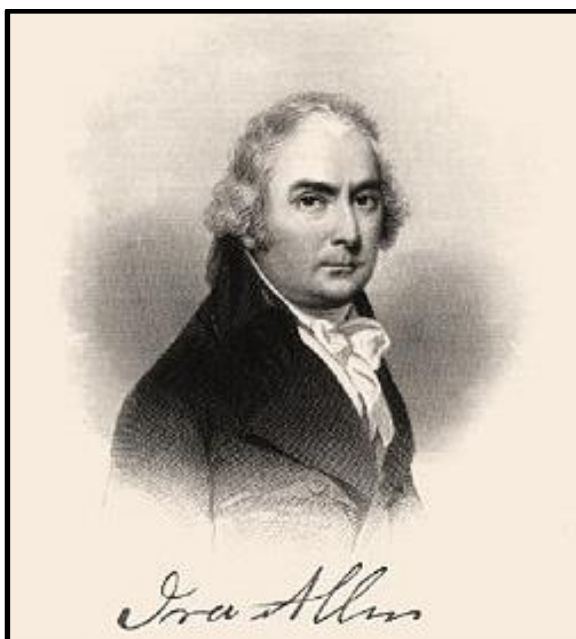


Figure 19: Ira Allen (1751-1814). Ira Allen was one of the leaders, alongside his brother Ethan Allen, of the Vermont separatist movement. Ira Allen also participated in the secret negotiations between the Vermont Republic and the British in Canada. Image courtesy of the Vermont Historical Society, c.1810.

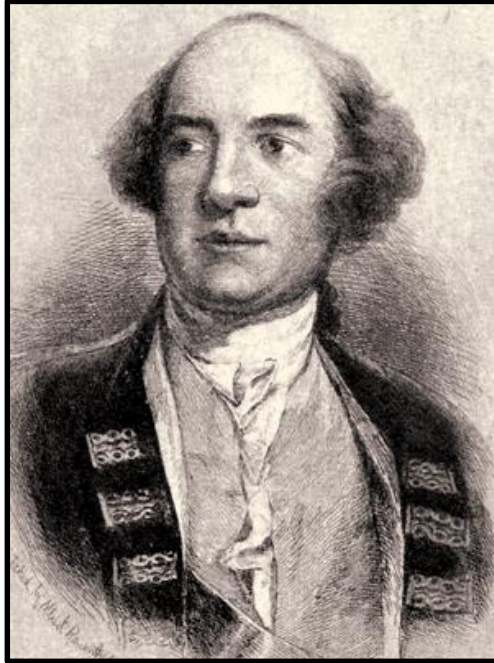


Figure 20: British General Frederick Haldimand (1718-1791). Haldimand was the Royal (military) Governor of Quebec, 1778-1786. As such, British secret service agents, such as Justus Sherwood, reported to him. Haldimand wished to create a peace between Vermont and Great Britain in the early 1780s, but was skeptical of the sincerity of Vermont. Image courtesy of the Vermont Historical Society.

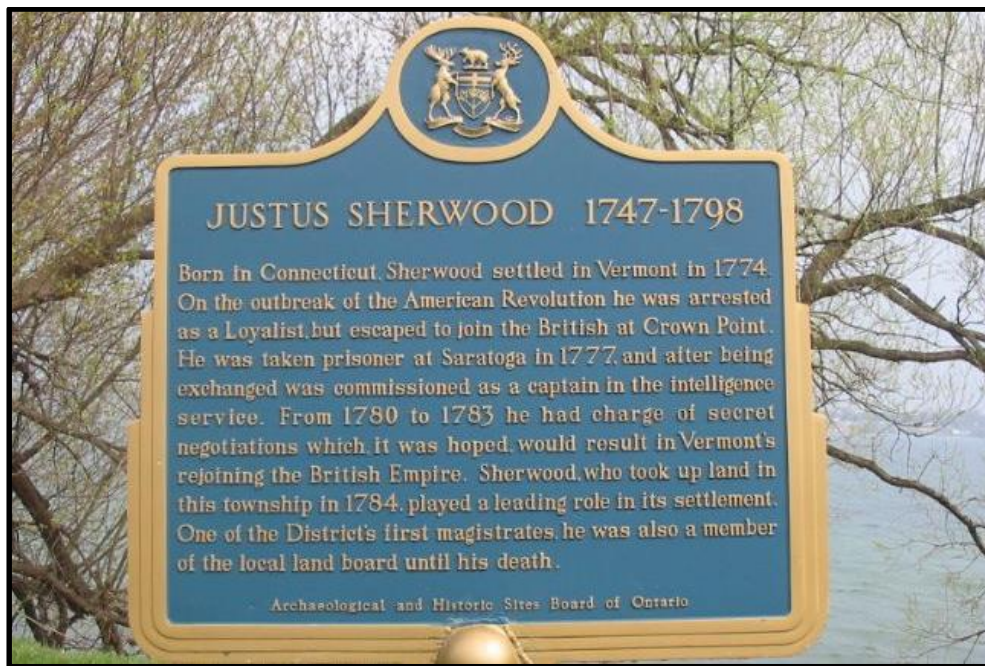


Figure 21: Historic plaque for Captain Justus Sherwood, Head of the British Secret Service in the Northern Department during the American Revolutionary War. Sherwood spearheaded the negotiations of the reunion of Vermont with Great Britain in the early 1780s. This plaque is located in the town of Prescott, Ontario and was placed by the Ontario Heritage Trust. Photo taken by Alan L. Brown (2004), and courtesy of Ontario's Historical Plaques.

negotiations with the British when they became known late in the fall of 1780.³⁰ Under the spotlight of public scrutiny, however, he resigned from his military command as Brigadier General of Vermont and retreated to a more private life. His brother, Ira, resumed the negotiations with Sherwood in Ethan's stead, and continued to do so for the next year. The lack of more widespread approval by Vermont state representatives continued to be a hindrance for the settlement of the negotiations.

A temporary truce between Vermont and Great Britain was established by the spring of 1781, but the terms of Vermont's re-entry into the British Empire were retarded by Ira Allen's vacillating diplomacy. It appears that Ira Allen was buying time for Vermont. It also appears as if both Ira Allen and Chittenden preferred an independent Vermont over deferment to a king across a vast ocean. If Great Britain had provided a decisive victory over the rebels during the course of the negotiations, no doubt they would have come to terms for the reunion of Vermont with Great Britain. However, Chittenden and Allen knew that as long as the rebels still had a chance of winning, many Vermonters would be outraged over a deal with the enemy. In fact, the resistance to peace with the British that existed so strongly east of the Green Mountains was one of the reasons given by Allen to Sherwood as a hindrance to completing a treaty.³¹

British records give no explicit reason for capturing Thomas Johnson in the spring of 1781, but it makes sense that after months of fruitless negotiations with the Allens they needed information about, and leverage over, the eastern side of the state. According to

³⁰ Ethan Allen, quoted in Sherman, Sessions, and Potash, *Freedom and Unity*, 114.

³¹ David Bennett, *A Few Lawless Vagabonds: Ethan Allen, the Republic of Vermont, and the American Revolution* (Havertown, PA: Casemate, 2014), 192–3.

his own account, Johnson decided “to make the best of a Bad bargain” by finding out the truth behind the negotiations between the British and “our Enimies” in the Bennington Party.³² It is interesting to note that Johnson referred to the Allen brothers and Chittenden as his enemies rather than the British, which shows the extent of disunity in Vermont during this time. Johnson knew that “the ondy way to git the Secret was to Pretend that I wanted to have it a State and that I wanted to have it Secured by government,” which meant government under the king. Johnson spoke of such a desire to Captain Pritchard the very first night of his capture. Pritchard agreed to “Let me in to the Secret if that was my opinon,” to which Johnson “was obliged to Confarm as I was a Prisner.” Johnson believed that “I had as good Found out all that they were adoing as to Live in ignorance.”

Thomas Johnson was presented to Justus Sherwood the first day he arrived at Isle aux Noix. In his journal, Johnson recorded that “Capt. Sherwood called on me to examine me. In the evening Captain Sherwood and Captain Pritchard waited on me to Mr. Jones where we drank a bottle of wine.”³³ Apparently, Sherwood was pleased enough with the “examination” of Johnson’s loyalties to celebrate with libations.

The next day, Sherwood escorted Johnson to St. Johns, a British fort thirteen miles further north up the Richelieu River. There Johnson met Colonel Barry St. Leger, the commandant, who gave Johnson a clean shirt and some refreshment.³⁴ Johnson slept

³² “Thomas Johnson’s Account of His Espionage & Intelligence Activities, C. February-May 1782.”

³³ Johnson, “Journal of Captivity,” March 12, 1781.

³⁴ Johnson, “Journal of Captivity.” After returning home to Newbury, Johnson wrote William Marsh a letter of thanks for “the great Pleasher and Satisfacon that show in your Company and Frinship while we Lived to gether,” and for “the many Favours That I Recived from you.” Source: “Letter from Thomas Johnson to William Marsh, C. 1781” n.d., Johnson Papers DOC 574: 17, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.



Figure 22: Colonel Barry St. Leger. St. Leger was the Commandant of St. John's when Johnson was there as a prisoner. St. Leger hosted Johnson during some of his stay in Canada, and knew of the negotiations between Vermont and Canada. Johnson later recalled that St. Leger treated him with great hospitality. Image is printed in The American Historical Record Volume III, edited by Benson J. Lossing (1874), which described St. Leger as "small in stature, active, ambitious, conceited, brave, mild-mannered and humane." (p.435)

that night in the home of William Marsh, a former Vermonter and Green Mountain Boy who turned from a patriot rebel in 1776 to a loyalist in mid-1777 in an effort to obtain recognition of an independent Vermont from the British. Marsh was exiled to Canada and

there used his knowledge of the former Grants to advise the British during the Haldimand Affair.³⁵ After that first night at St. Johns, Johnson stayed with Justus Sherwood, but he also dined with Marsh twice more, and St. Leger once more, over the next ten days.

Sherwood believed Johnson could potentially be useful in bringing eastern Vermont “at least to neutrality” on the issue of a union with Great Britain, but was skeptical of Johnson’s sincerity.³⁶ Sherwood watched Johnson closely and interviewed him frequently while Johnson stayed with him. According to Johnson’s later account, Sherwood “Sum mistrusted me.”³⁷ Johnson described Sherwood’s examinations as follows: “I found Capt Sherwood to be the most Penetrating of any in the Province[.] I had hard work to git A Long with him[.] his Exammnations ware SRICT and Clost.”

Johnson “was Determined Not to tell a Lie that they Cold Find me out in,” so he claimed he was only willing to make peace with Great Britain because he was tired of a war that pitted neighbor against neighbor, not because of an ardent loyalty to the government of the king:

the best way that I Cold git of was by Saying that... I Cold Not think of Taking up armes a gainst King or Cuntry for I wold Not Fite a gainst my Nabours but wold Do Every thing that was in my Power For a Settlement with Briten [&]that I was Tiard of the war as well as my Nabours.³⁸

³⁵ Like Thomas Johnson, William Marsh’s story shows the flexibility of identity and loyalty for Vermonters during the Revolutionary War. For the full story see: Brown and Brown, *Col. William Marsh*.

³⁶ Sherwood, quoted in: Mathews, *Frontier Spies*, 110.

³⁷ “Thomas Johnson’s Account of His Espionage & Intelligence Activities, C. February-May 1782.”

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Even after being offered a promotion and commission in the British army if he would “swear allegiance to the King,” Johnson refused to identify as a loyalist. Johnson did, however, try to promote his potential usefulness by claiming that “I well knew the Disposition of the inhabitants on the Frontiers,” and who the “Few Deserving men” were that “brought those Poor People in to Trouble” by joining the rebels. Johnson claimed that while he was at St. Johns he was “more or Less Pumped Every Day” for this story, and kept “under the Strictest watch of Every word that I Said” by Sherwood and Marsh.

About two weeks after arriving at St. Johns, Johnson presented his case to General Haldimand through letter. He repeated his desire for peace and his claim that if he could return home he would help the cause towards a ceasefire, and perhaps a union with Canada. Johnson pledged his gentlemanly “Honor and fidelity” to these promises, as well as to the promise that he would return to Canada if called upon, until he was exchanged.³⁹ On the 10th of April, he received a response. General Haldimand said he was “willing to believe my Principles and my Profession to be Sincere,” but was unwilling to release Johnson on parole at home.⁴⁰ Johnson was to be “well treated and Strictly watched” and “tried and Proved with time.” Johnson spent the first three months of his capture travelling back and forth between Isle aux Noix and St. John’s,

³⁹ Johnson, quoted in: Mathews, *Frontier Spies*, 110.

⁴⁰ “Thomas Johnson’s Account of His Espionage & Intelligence Activities, C. February-May 1782.”

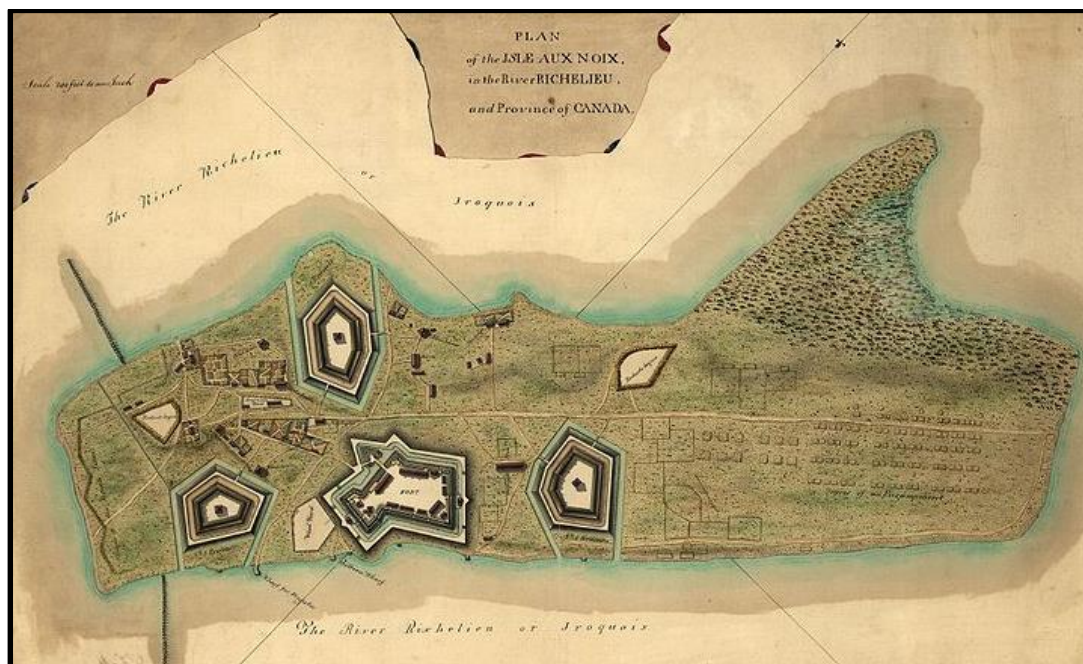


Figure 23: Isle Aux Noix. Thomas Johnson arrived here as a prisoner of war on March 12, 1781. This was also the site of many of the meetings between the Allen brothers and Colonel Sherwood. Image courtesy of the United States Library of Congress's Geography & Map Division. (c.1770-1780)



Figure 24: Fort Saint John, depicted in 1775. Watercolor by James Hunter (c.1790). Image courtesy of the Toronto Public Library.

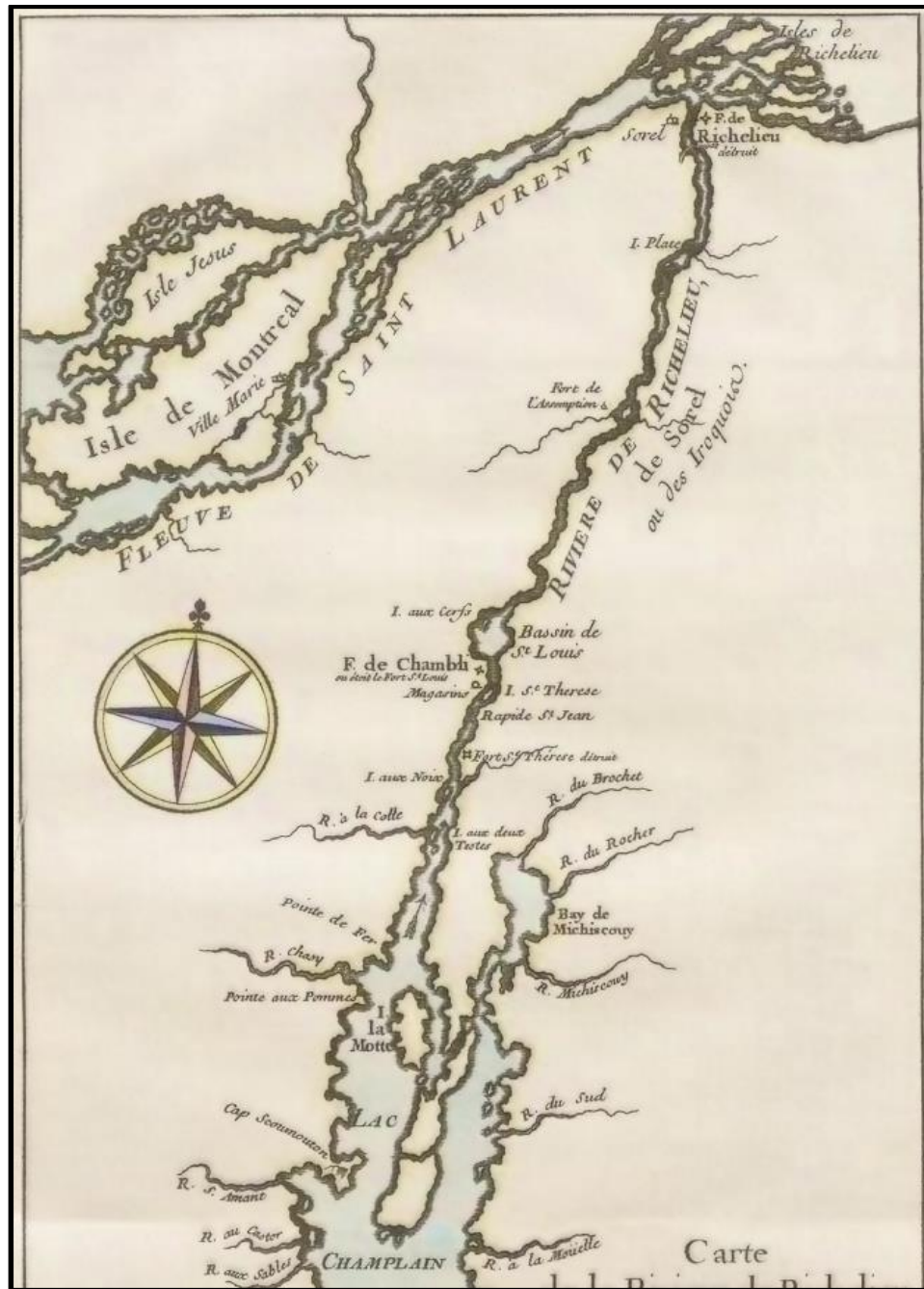


Figure 25: Inset of a map of the Richelieu River. This map was made in 1744, but still shows many of the sites Johnson visited while in Canada. The Lamoille River, the banks of which the captured Johnson travelled on en route to Canada, feeds into Lake Champlain at the bottom of this image. Near the compass is "L'aux Noix," or Isle aux Noix. Fort Saint Jean was just north of Isle aux Noix. Just above "Bassin de St. Louis" was where Troi-Rivieres was located. Additionally, this map shows how the Richelieu River connected Lake Champlain to the St. Lawrence River, which eventually flowed out to the Atlantic Ocean. The map was originally printed in Pierre-Francois-Xavier de Charlevoix's *Histoire de Description Generale de la Nouvelle France* (1744). Image courtesy of the Newberry Library in Chicago, IL.

interviewed for intelligence and sincerity, and with watchful eyes constantly recording his actions.

Johnson faced many critics during his time of trial. In late May, Sherwood wrote to Haldimand and repeated his suspicions of Johnson's trustworthiness. In mid-April a man by the name of Colonel Peters informed Haldimand that Johnson was "Very Suttel" and a "Vary Dangros Person."⁴¹ In response to these accusations, Johnson felt the need to prove his loyalty by giving Haldimand information against the patriot rebels, though he tried to choose things "which I knew Cold Do No hurt." Johnson believed that he may have been given parole at home despite Peters' criticism if it had not been for "Sum of my Nabours," most likely Loyalist informants or refugees, who "Did Not think that it wold be Safe for me to Return home... For they Cold Not trust me with out Sundry Trial." Even Colonel Allen, whose arrival to Isle aux Noix "with the flag from Vermont" Johnson witnessed on May 7, 1781, was "A Ferd to Trust me as yet al tho I was Doing Evry thing in my Power to help him."⁴² Johnson's reputation as a rebel prevented an easy transition for a new reputation as a seeker of an alliance with Canada for Vermont independence and peace. The fact that the fluidity of the Vermont identity did not make them mutually exclusive, though, kept the door open for Johnson to claim a position in the negotiations.

By early summer, Haldimand was beginning to grow impatient with the Allens' lack of commitment. In August, Haldimand decided it was all a ruse and that Vermont

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.; Johnson, "Journal of Captivity," May 7, 1781.

was going to sit on the fence and wait to see who was going to win the larger war before committing to a side. He describe the future of Vermont by saying “In 6 months she will be a Respectable Ally to either side.”⁴³ Because the negotiations were going nowhere for the time being, Johnson’s use was quite limited, and his residence in Canadian military bases was potentially dangerous for the British because Johnson could collect information on British movements and strategy that he and later pass on to the rebels if exchanged. It was probably for these reasons that Johnson received orders on June 9th that he was to be paroled at Three Rivers, a residential town where Johnson would take no further participation in the negotiations between Vermont and Canada, but kept as a potential tool to be used later.⁴⁴

In September of 1781, Haldimand gave Ira Allen an ultimatum that forced him to agree to terms of a reunion or face renewed warfare. Pushed into a corner, Allen agreed to a settlement that included acknowledgement of all New Hampshire-issued grants and free trade with Canada. (The latter was an issue of more importance to the towns that lay along the banks of Lake Champlain than those that lay on the banks of the Connecticut River). The plan would be announced by proclamation by Colonel St. Leger, who would wait for a signal from Allen before marching down Lake Champlain and taking Ticonderoga. Allen still found ways to play both sides, though, even after agreeing to the plan. A round robin letter was circulated amongst Vermont politicians in favor of the plan, most of them part of Chittenden and the Allens’ political party, and sent to

⁴³ Frederick Haldimand, quoted in: Sherman, Sessions, and Potash, *Freedom and Unity*, 114.

⁴⁴ Johnson, “Journal of Captivity,” June 9, 1781.

Haldimand later that month. However, the signal for St. Leger to advance his troops into Vermont was never sent. Allen only had to stall a few weeks before news of Cornwallis's defeat at Yorktown on October 19th reached Canada and stalled implementation of the plan.

Before the news of Yorktown reached Montreal, though, Haldimand decided to utilize Johnson in the new plan of union. Haldimand believed that once St. Leger's proclamation reached the ears of Vermonters, some would need additional persuasion to return to the arms of the British Empire, especially those who lived in the more rebellious eastern half of the state. Johnson was to return to Newbury to assist the British in securing acceptance of the deal. On August 28, 1781 Johnson received news that he "might return home on Parole" and that a British officer "would call on me in a few days," no doubt after Haldimand received a reply from Ira to the ultimatum.⁴⁵ On September 11th, Johnson left Three Rivers. After a two-week visit to Montreal to advocate for his imprisoned brother-in-law, during which time Johnson "got Page out of Irons," Johnson returned to St. Johns to receive orders.⁴⁶ On October 5, 1781 Johnson signed a parole oath that allowed him to return home, and on October 12th, Johnson arrived home to his family.

According to his parole oath, Johnson agreed to not "Do or Say any thing contrary to his Majesty's Interest," and to "repair to whatever place [Haldimand] shall judge Expident." Not documented in his parole oath, though, were the promises Johnson made

⁴⁵ Ibid., August 28, 1781.

⁴⁶ Ibid., September 26, 1781.

to “inform how matters stood in that [eastern] part” of Vermont.⁴⁷ Haldimand gave Johnson a seal to “to affix to all my letters of correspondence, that I need not sign my name & be in danger of discover.”⁴⁸ Johnson was also called on by passing British scouts for provisions, newspapers, and intelligence. Levi Sylvester, in particular, frequently visited Johnson’s house during the first year of Johnson’s return.

Johnson’s secret involvement with the British had the potential to compromise his status in the community, his participation with the rebels, and his life. Whether to protect himself if exposed, or to protect the rebel cause, or both, Johnson told Jacob Bayley of his predicament shortly after arriving home. Johnson would have preferred to be exchanged, but since that had not yet happened, Johnson became a reluctant double-agent.

Johnson’s loyalty to the rebels after his capture by the British has been questioned by previous historians. Hazel C. Mathews, a leading historian on the British Secret Service in Canada during the Revolutionary War, contends that Johnson did not intend to provide counter-espionage from the beginning, stating for evidence the fact that it took Johnson seven months at home to write his first letter to George Washington, which gave the information he collected against the British.⁴⁹ However, Mathews fails to acknowledge that according to eighteenth-century social culture, Johnson would not have immediately written directly to the Continental Army Commander in Chief. A letter from

⁴⁷ “Thomas Johnson’s Account of His Espionage & Intelligence Activities, C. February-May 1782.”

⁴⁸ “Letter from Thomas Johnson to George Washington, September 20, 1782.”

⁴⁹ Mathews, *Frontier Spies*, 112.

an unknown like Johnson would have never been opened by such a prominent man, even if Johnson was considered a gentleman in his own hometown. Instead, the route for Johnson's intelligence was through more immediate rebel leaders, including Johnson's long-time friend and father-figure, Jacob Bayley.

Bayley learned that Johnson held the confidence of the enemy sometime before November 10, 1781, less than a month after Johnson returned home on parole. On that day in November, Bayley wrote a letter to General Washington that claimed that Johnson had intelligence for the rebels that Bayley "dare not commit to writing."⁵⁰ In early December Washington received another letter about Johnson, this time from William Heath, a Major General of the Continental Army from Massachusetts, whom Johnson likely knew as a superior officer in charge of Burgoyne's surrendered troops in 1777. Heath told Washington "that there is undoubtedly a plan of Union maturing between the British Government in Canada and some of the leading men of Vermont," and that "a Colonal Thomas Johnson who belongs to the Grants and was prisoner at Montreal has intrusted himself in the matter with views of discovering their designs."⁵¹ Another rebel leader who was told of Johnson's situation was James Lovell, a Continental Congress

⁵⁰ "Letter from Jacob Bayley to George Washington, November 10, 1781" (Newbury, VT), Johnson Papers DOCS 574: 20, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.

⁵¹ "Letter from William Heath to George Washington, December 4, 1781" (Headquarters Highland), Series 4, Library of Congress, Washington Papers.

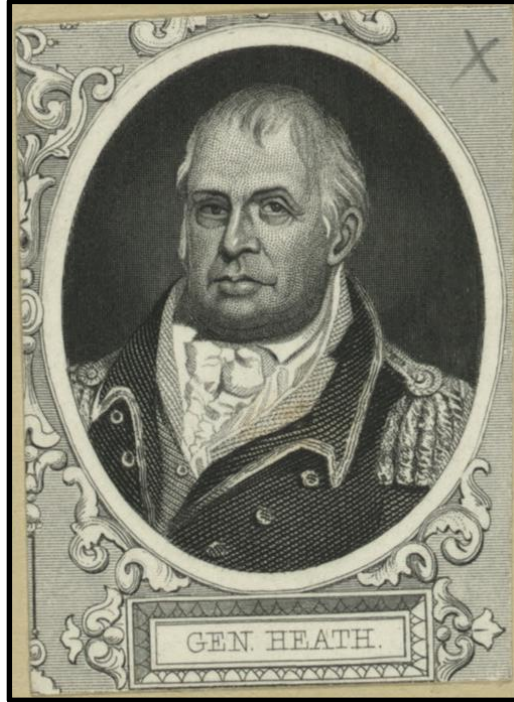


Figure 26: General William Heath of Massachusetts. Heath was one of the men in whom Thomas Johnson confided. Heath wrote to General George Washington on Johnson's behalf and requested a prisoner exchange so that Johnson could be free to give all of his intelligence to the rebel cause. Image courtesy of New York Public Library.

delegate from Massachusetts and member of the congressional Committee of Secret Correspondence. On March 7, 1782, Jacob Bayley told Lovell for at least the second time about Johnson's counter-espionage: "You may remember that I mentioned the case of Capt Thomas Johnson to you... I told you Johnson had the confidence of the enemy in Canada."⁵² Bayley, Heath, and Lovell all wrote to George Washington on Johnson's behalf before Johnson penned his first letter to the general on May 30, 1782.

Johnson was reluctant at first to tell all that he knew about the British because of the promise in his parole oath that he would not help the rebel cause. If he broke his oath,

⁵² "Letter from Jacob Bayley to James Lovell, March 7, 1782" (Newbury, VT), Johnson Papers DOCS 574: 20, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.

his whole status as a gentleman would be compromised. His word of honor would never be trusted again by anyone on any side. Johnson saw another way, though. If he were exchanged, his parole oath would be moot and he would be free to tell everything he found out in Canada about British strategies, supplies, and, most importantly, negotiations with Vermont. Bayley understood and respected Johnson's delicate situation. In his November letter to George Washington, Bayley said that Johnson "could not divulge any matters since he gave his parole."⁵³ Instead, Bayley received the information in a round-about way. While still in Montreal and before signing his parole oath, Johnson told all he knew to a captured rebel prisoner, "Capt. Sher Edgar," who conveniently later escaped and made his way to Newbury. Edgar was the one who told Bayley of Johnson's information before Bayley sent Edgar to General Washington with his letter. Bayley did not pressure Johnson to tell him more after his parole oath was sworn, and instead insisted on the "the necessity of his being exchanged in order to prove the treasonable conduct of a member of Vermont &c."⁵⁴ Bayley claimed that Johnson's situation was

really critical for without Genl Washingtons particular directions he is exposed to the severest punishment^l.] if he does not correspond the enemy will suspect him and he be exposed to be recalled to Canada by which we shall lose his evidence in matters of the greatest importance.⁵⁵

⁵³ "Letter from Jacob Bayley to George Washington, November 10, 1781."

⁵⁴ "Letter from Jacob Bayley to James Lovell, March 7, 1782."

⁵⁵ "Letter from Jacob Bayley to George Washington, March 12, 1782" (Newbury, VT), Johnson Papers DOCS 574: 20, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.

Heath echoed Bayley's sentiments. He ended his letter to Washington with "I beg leave, therefore, to submit to your Excellency some measures being taken to effect the exchange of Colonel Johnson, by which means the suspected plan may be developed."⁵⁶ Johnson, in his own letter to Washington on May 30, 1782 suggested that "by a regular exchange I may be enabled to give all the intelligence in my power without hazarding my character."⁵⁷

By the end of May, however, Johnson thought the enemy was "so far advanced as not to admit of farther delay" in giving his collected intelligence and that he was "determined to do at the risk of my honor – my all."⁵⁸ Johnson then gave a full account of all he knew to Washington. In this particular extremity, Johnson's national identity as an American patriot trumped his identification as a gentleman, though Johnson never quit trying to remove the parole oath that caused the conflict between the two.

Johnson told Washington the names of men in New York, Vermont, and New Hampshire who spied for the British, that the troops in Canada were quite low on provisions, and that fortifications and "batteax" were being built by the redcoats along Lake Champlain. Johnson also passed along rumors from passing scouts that the "British were going to evacuate New York and Charleston and to go with all their force to Canada."⁵⁹ More than any other issue, though, Johnson was concerned with the negotiations between Vermont and Haldimand. He warned that "outlines of a treaty were

⁵⁶ "Letter from William Heath to George Washington, December 4, 1781."

⁵⁷ "Letter from Thomas Johnson to George Washington, September 20, 1782."

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

then actually formed between them, viz. that Vermont should be a Charter Government.”

As for the Allens and their cohorts, Johnson had these words: “These actions of the infernal villians is enough to make my blood run cold in every vein!” Johnson pleaded for Washington’s assistance and forewarned that “unless protected by your Excellency the innocent with the guilty would share a miserable fate.”

Of course by the time Washington heard from Johnson he had already received accounts of the negotiations between Vermont and Canada from Lovell, Bayley and Heath. Bayley believed the negotiations were acts of treason. He advised Washington that “the correspondence of Vermont with the enemy is not to deceive them but was actually designed to destroy the United States.”⁶⁰ Washington, however, disagreed. He knew the precarious situation that the inhabitants of Vermont were in, and how a reunion with the British could be used as a bargaining chip for Vermont independence. Washington confided to Heath that he was “at a loss to know whetherr the Vermontese are playing a merely political or guilty game. I have reason to think the former.”⁶¹ Washington also wrote back to Johnson to tell him that he would not be getting exchanged. Instead, Washington asked Johnson to “collect any intelligence you shall think of importance,” and submit it to rebel leaders.⁶² In essence, Washington requested Johnson be a double agent.

⁶⁰ “Letter from Jacob Bayley to George Washington, March 12, 1782.”

⁶¹ “Letter from George Washington to William Heath, December 15, 1781” (Headquarters Highland), Series 4, Library of Congress, Washington Papers.

⁶² Washington, “Letter from George Washington to Thomas Johnson, June 14, 1782.”

The entire time that Johnson was giving information to Bayley, Washington, and other leaders of the rebellion, he continued helping the British gather information on eastern Vermont and the rebel cause. Johnson wrote to Colonel St. Leger around December of 1781 and informed him that “There is much talk of a Peace.”⁶³ With his letter, Johnson also sent newspapers that covered the surrender of Cornwallis, which Johnson called an “unhappy affair,” and the French attack of British-held Sint Eustatius in the Caribbean. Johnson promised that if the situation near him should change, he would “endeavour to give you the Earliest Notes.”

In his letter to Washington, Johnson explained why he provided information for the British.

I determined in every shape to pursue such measures as would be most likely to gain an acquaintance with their secret movements and operations so that on my return home, I might be able to render service to my country. Hence it will not appear strange that I should easily consent to continue a Correspondence for a further benefit to the public.⁶⁴

In addition to his letter to St. Leger, Johnson was called on to communicate with Captain Pritchard as well. Levi Sylvester, former resident of Newbury and now message carrier for the British, first visited Johnson’s home with letters from Pritchard in January of 1782.⁶⁵ After that, Sylvester was “Several Times at my house” according to Johnson’s later

⁶³ “Letter from Thomas Johnson to Barry St. Leger, C. December 1781,” Johnson Papers DOC 574: 18, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library. The letter is undated, but must have been written between November 26, 1781 as it references the French attack of Sint Eustatius that took place on that date, and December 31, 1781, since it requests the return of Jacob Page to home, which happened sometime before the end of the calendar year according to Well’s *History of Newbury*.

⁶⁴ “Letter from Thomas Johnson to George Washington, September 20, 1782.”

⁶⁵ Ibid.

recollections.⁶⁶ Sylvester delivered letters for Johnson as well as letters addressed to loyalists in the region. Johnson was supposed to make sure they reached their final destinations. Johnson delivered the letters, but not before he opened, copied, and resealed them to later show Jacob Bayley.⁶⁷ Johnson also made copies of his responses to the British and forwarded the copies to Washington.⁶⁸

When possible, Johnson attempted to distance himself from his promised activity with the British. On May 18, 1782 Johnson received a summons to meet with Major Rogers in Moretown “as Soon as I Cold.”⁶⁹ Johnson delayed the meeting because it was raining, and “was So Dark and So Late.” By the time Johnson arrived the next day Rogers had moved on. In another incident, when Pritchard arrived in Newbury in June and confided in Johnson his plans to capture a leading area rebel, Johnson tried to convince him otherwise. In these ways, Johnson showed his ultimate loyalty to the rebellion, even while he took advantage of the fluctuating state of Vermont.

Johnson’s loyalty to the rebellion was soon to be tested, though, for Johnson failed in convincing Pritchard to drop his plans to capture a rebel leader. Johnson was left

⁶⁶ “Thomas Johnson’s Account of His Espionage & Intelligence Activities, C. February-May 1782.”

⁶⁷ “Letter from Jacob Bayley to James Lovell, March 7, 1782”; “Letter from Thomas Johnson to George Washington, September 20, 1782.”

⁶⁸ “Letter from Thomas Johnson to George Washington, September 20, 1782.”

⁶⁹ “Thomas Johnson’s Account of His Espionage & Intelligence Activities, C. February-May 1782”; “Letter from Thomas Johnson to George Washington, September 20, 1782.”

with the decision to either maintain his position of trust with the British or risk being found out that he broke his parole oath and recalled to Canada for imprisonment under harsh conditions if he chose to warn his friend and mentor, Jacob Bayley, of Pritchard's plans against him. Johnson had only hours to decide, and the consequences of his actions influenced his reputation for the rest of his life.

CHAPTER THREE

Thomas Johnson: Patriot

As dusk fell on June 15, 1782, an armed group of about ten British scouts and local Tories fell upon the house of rebel General Jacob Bayley.¹ Suspicion of such an attack had led the local militia to guard the house night and day, but the lone sentry was quickly overwhelmed at the door. The disturbance, however, warned the rest of the militia guard inside of the house, who escaped by jumping out of first floor windows. One man was shot in the arm – the only hostile shot fired in Newbury during the whole of the Revolution – as he made his escape. Left inside of the house as the attackers entered was one of Bayley's servant men named Pike who was taken captive with the door sentry, and a young nursing maid named Sarah Fowler, who was in charge of one of the Bayleys' infant grandsons.

British Captains Pritchard and Breakenridge searched the house in vain for the general, but “to their inescapable sorrow, the villain was not at home.”² Failing to capture their target, they started to search the home for correspondence and intelligence, but Fowler fluttered from room to room ahead of the soldiers and blew out all of the candles.

¹ The story of the attempted capture of General Jacob Bayley is mentioned in almost all secondary sources on the topics of British intelligence in Canada during the Revolutionary War and of the Haldimand Negotiations. Some of the most complete versions are found in: Wells, *History of Newbury, VT*, 99–101; Gavin K. Watt, *I Am Heartily Ashamed: The Revolutionary War's Final Campaign as Waged from Canada in 1782*, vol. 2 (Toronto, ON: Dundurn, 2010), 207–9; Mathews, *Frontier Spies*, 74–5. Additionally, the account was recorded at the time in: Moses Dowe, “Letter from Moses Dowe to Mehech Weare, June 16, 1782,” in *The History of Newbury, VT* (St. Johnsbury, VT: The Caledonian Company, 1902), 401–3.

² Dr. George Smyth, the second-in command of British Intelligence in the Northern Department under Justus Sherwood, as quoted in: Mathews, *Frontier Spies*, 75.

The candles could have been relit but gunshots were heard nearby, fired by none other than Bayley's neighbor, Abigail Johnson, Thomas Johnson's wife.³ The shots served as a call to arms for the rest of the militia to gather and defend their town. The group of men in Bayley's house rushed to retreat with their two prisoners. Less than half a mile down the road, they fortuitously came upon twenty-five year old James Bayley, the son of their intended target. Like his father at Fort William Henry, James travelled bare-foot. Unlike his father, James was captured by his enemy.

The British wanted to capture General Jacob Bayley because he was a hindrance to their plans of reuniting Vermont with the British Empire. The British believed Bayley was the cause of inspiration for many people near the Oxbow to take up arms against the king. He either aligned himself with the cause of the United States above the cause of Vermont, or believed that Vermont had its best chance by allying itself with the new republican state. Since Bayley would not accept a compromised peace with the king for recognition of Vermont's independence, Haldimand needed him removed.

Thomas Johnson was faced with the dilemma of being forced to decide between his identity as a Vermonter and gentleman and his loyalty as an American patriot on the morning of the attempted capture. He was called to meet with British Captains Pritchard and Breckenridge who informed Johnson that Bayley "was thwarting the plans" of uniting Vermont and Canada and "that they had come to take him prisoner."⁴ The rules of gentlemanly honor required Johnson to "not Do or Say any thing contrary to his

³ The contributions of Sarah Fowler and Abigail Johnson are given in: Wells, *History of Newbury, VT*, 100.

⁴ Dowe, "Letter from Moses Dowe to Mehech Weare, June 16, 1782."

Majesty's Interest or his Government" as stipulated in his parole oath. Further, if he warned Bayley and was found out, he could be recalled to Canada and left to languish in a poorly-supplied prison, at best, or convicted of treason and executed at worst. As a participant in the patriot cause, however, Johnson could not stand by and allow his leader, not to mention friend, be captured. Additionally, if the rebels learned that he met with Pritchard that morning and that he did not warn them of the impending attack, he would be suspected by them. According to the account Johnson gave the next day to the leading patriot across the river in Haverhill, NH, Moses Dow, Johnson decided to send Bayley a warning in secret.

He enlisted the help of his brother-in-law, Dudley Carleton, as messenger. Johnson gave Carleton a paper note and directed him to ride to Bayley's fields, where the general was plowing with his sons. Carleton rode only up to the edge of the field before dropping the note, close enough to attract the attention of the Bayleys, but not to arise suspicion from anyone else who may have been watching. Bayley saw the note as Carleton released it and when he retrieved it he read: "Samson, the Philistines are upon Thee."⁵ He ordered his sons to turn out the horses and finish for the night before slipping across the river to Haverhill.

⁵ A warning from Johnson is mentioned in several letters written not long after the event, and in memoirs written a few years after, but the exact way Johnson warned Bayley is not elaborated on in any primary source material. The details about the cryptic note, and its exact wording is mentioned in almost all of the secondary sources, but none of them cite their source. It first appeared in Frederic Wells's *History of Newbury* (p.99), published in 1902. Wells was a local of Newbury, so perhaps the details were given to him orally by the offspring or grandchildren of those involved. In an account given to George Washington, Bayley wrote that "the Enemy did not Speak with Capt Johnson till about two hours before the Enemy came to my House So that he could give me no more notice than a sign to take care." "Letter from Jacob Bayley to George Washington, June 29, 1782" (Newbury, VT, n.d.), Series 4, Library of Congress, Washington Papers.

Other accounts say that Bayley was warned in other ways, either instead of or in addition to Johnsons' cryptic note. According to Frederic Well's *History of Newbury*, Bayley received intelligence from Albany mere hours before Johnson's note reached him. A British spy named Kentfield was executed by the rebels in New York earlier the same week and confessed to the plans to capture General Bayley.⁶ This is unlikely, however, as Moses Dow's letter to Meshech Weare, which gave Johnson's account and was written the day after it happened, claims that it was a "great pity" that the Kentfield's confession didn't reach the Oxbow until "six hours" too late.⁷ Another version of events was given by James Bayley while a prisoner in Canada. When interrogated, James told British officials that he became suspicious when he saw Johnson riding into the woods (to meet Pritchard) when he knew Johnson was sick, so James warned his father.⁸ Whether James was trying to protect Johnson or was telling the truth is unknown. Lastly, according to British captain Justus Sherwood, General Bayley was warned of the upcoming attack by a young girl who was sent by Thomas's wife, Abigail Johnson.⁹

Because the situation forced Johnson to pick sides while playing a double game, it is no surprise that he was compromised from both sides. After mid-June 1782, neither side fully trusted him. Men such as Moses Dow on the rebel side and Dr. George Smyth, Prichard's second in command on the British side, continued to vouch for Johnson

⁶ Wells, *History of Newbury, VT*, 99.

⁷ Dowe, "Letter from Moses Dowe to Mehech Weare, June 16, 1782."

⁸ Mathews, *Frontier Spies*, 76.

⁹ "Letter from Justus Sherwood to Robert Mathews (October 14, 1782; Loyal Blockhouse, VT)," in *Haldimand Papers: Correspondence with Various Offices Relating to the Exchange of Prisoners and to Vermont, 1778-1784*, vol. 178, B (Ottawa, Canada, 1985).

throughout the affair, but many others, including Jacob Bayley himself, either openly suspected Johnson's motives or acted warily of the man after June 1782. Just which side Johnson ultimately identified with, rebel or British loyalism, was hard for contemporaries to figure out. Since the different accounts of Johnson's conduct at the time vary so greatly in describing his loyalty, it is even harder for historians to clear up. Perhaps it was hard for Johnson to figure out himself. Trying to decipher exactly with which side Johnson's loyalty ultimately lay is not as important, however, as recognizing that loyalty was complicated, chaotic, and fluid. As the case of Thomas Johnson shows, patriotism was not always made up solely of a simple and rigid integrity that generated consistent and reliable behaviors. Not only could people's identities fluctuate between sides, there was a sliding scale of loyalty. Rather than being a black-and-white affair, many actions in a grey area were condoned.

One of the reasons that much leeway was given was that the American Revolution was in many ways a civil war. Neighbors, who had recently shared friendship and mutual support, found themselves on different sides of the political debate. Fathers disagreed with their own sons. One of the most famous examples of how the war split loved ones was the case of founding father Benjamin Franklin, whose loyalist son William Franklin did not speak to him for many years during and after the war. An example closer to the

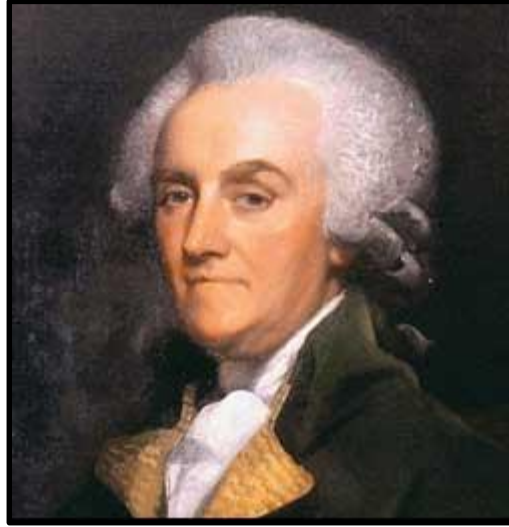


Figure 27: William Franklin, son of the well-known rebel leader Benjamin Franklin, was a passionate Loyalist during the American War of Independence. The difference in loyalties between William and his father ultimately led to an irreconcilable break in their relationship, and William relocated to England at the end of the war. They were just two of the many families, friends, and neighbors who found themselves on opposite sides of what was essentially a civil war. Portrait attributed to Mather Brown (c.1790). Image courtesy of the Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary.

story of Thomas Johnson is Captain Azariah Pritchard, the man who captured Johnson on March 8, 1781, and who had a father and a brother who were both ardent rebels.¹⁰ It must have been hard for many to condemn and prosecute the same people with whom they shared so much.

Historians don't know exactly how loyalty was split amongst the greater American population during the Revolutionary War, but all estimates recognize a strong and vibrant opposition to the rebellion. In 2000, historian Robert Calhoon estimated that 15-20% of colonial white Americans were loyalists.¹¹ Since Calhoon further stipulates

¹⁰ Gavin K. Watt, *A Dirty, Trifling Piece of Business: The Revolutionary War as Waged from Canada in 1781*, vol. 1 (Toronto, ON: Dundurn, 2009), 88.

¹¹ Calhoon's estimate is similar to Wallace Brown's 1969 estimate that loyalists made up 15-30% of the population of Revolutionary America. Robert Calhoon M., "Loyalist and Neutrality," in *A Companion to the American Revolution*, ed. Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole (John Wiley & Sons, 2000), 235; Wallace

that 40-45% of white Americans were rebels, then therefore 35-45% of the white population were unaffiliated. Between the unaffiliated and the loyalists, perhaps a majority of up to 65% were *not* proponents of the rebellion. Since the white population of the colonies during the war was just over 2 million, Calhoun's estimates suggest that 380,000-500,000 loyalists resided in the colonies at the beginning of the war. Many of them must have remained in the United States since only 80,000-100,000 of them had left by 1783.¹²

These numbers do not tell the full story, though, because the difference between loyalists and rebels in the general population was not always clear-cut. The ideology of the rebels evolved slowly between 1763, when pride in one's British identity was at its height following victory over the French, and 1776, when independence from the strongest existing empire was announced. Just as contentious political topics do today, the political crisis inspired many various interpretations and proposed solutions. It was possible to support resistance to the Stamp Act but not support resistance to further authority, just as it was possible to disagree with most of the British policies towards the colonies but disagree about hosting a violent rebellion. Declaring independence from Great Britain was another step that not all who supported fighting for one's rights could get behind, and those who did support it came to that support at different times.

Brown, *The Good Americans: The Loyalists In the American Revolution* (New York: William Morrow Company Inc, 1969), 227.

¹² Brown, *The Good Americans*, 182; Thomas B. Allen, *Tories: Fighting for the King in America's First Civil War* (New York: Harper Paperbacks, 2011), xix. Allen suggests that the 80-100,000 estimates reflect only the numbers who left Boston and New York, but does not include Tories who fled Savannah, Charlestown, and other southern cities, so perhaps the numbers of loyalists who remained in the United States were a bit fewer.

Pennsylvanian statesman, and eventual loyalist, Joseph Galloway rejected parliamentary taxation and served as a congressman in the First Continental Congress of 1774, but became a loyalist when he refused to politically break with Great Britain. Similarly, one of Georgia's most outstanding loyalists, John Joachim Zubly, wrote a pamphlet against the Stamp Act and represented his state at the Second Continental Congress of 1775 before ultimately remaining loyal to the crown.¹³ Even prominent rebel leaders Thomas Jefferson and George Washington advocated compromise with Great Britain for months after the first shots were already fired.¹⁴

The political disagreements were not just about whether to oppose the post-1763 British regime or not, but also about the form of opposition. Many common loyalists advocated patriot rights, but protested war, mobs, and independence. As the much quoted loyalist Congregational minister Mather Byles put it, "Which is better – to be ruled by one tyrant three thousand miles away, or by three thousand tyrants not a mile away?"¹⁵ Support for and against the rebels' cause reached various levels and grew at various paces amongst different individuals.

¹³ Brown, *The Good Americans*, 33.

¹⁴ Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), 228. Maier's book deftly tracks the development of American resistance to British policies and how that resistance evolved over time into open rebellion. Maier argues that resistance did not necessarily mean revolution. For example, when the Sons of Liberty first organized they consciously limited themselves to only actions that involved the Stamp Act. Only after following all delineated lines of political redress to no avail did some of the colonists resolve to rebel.

¹⁵ Brown, *The Good Americans*, 66–74.

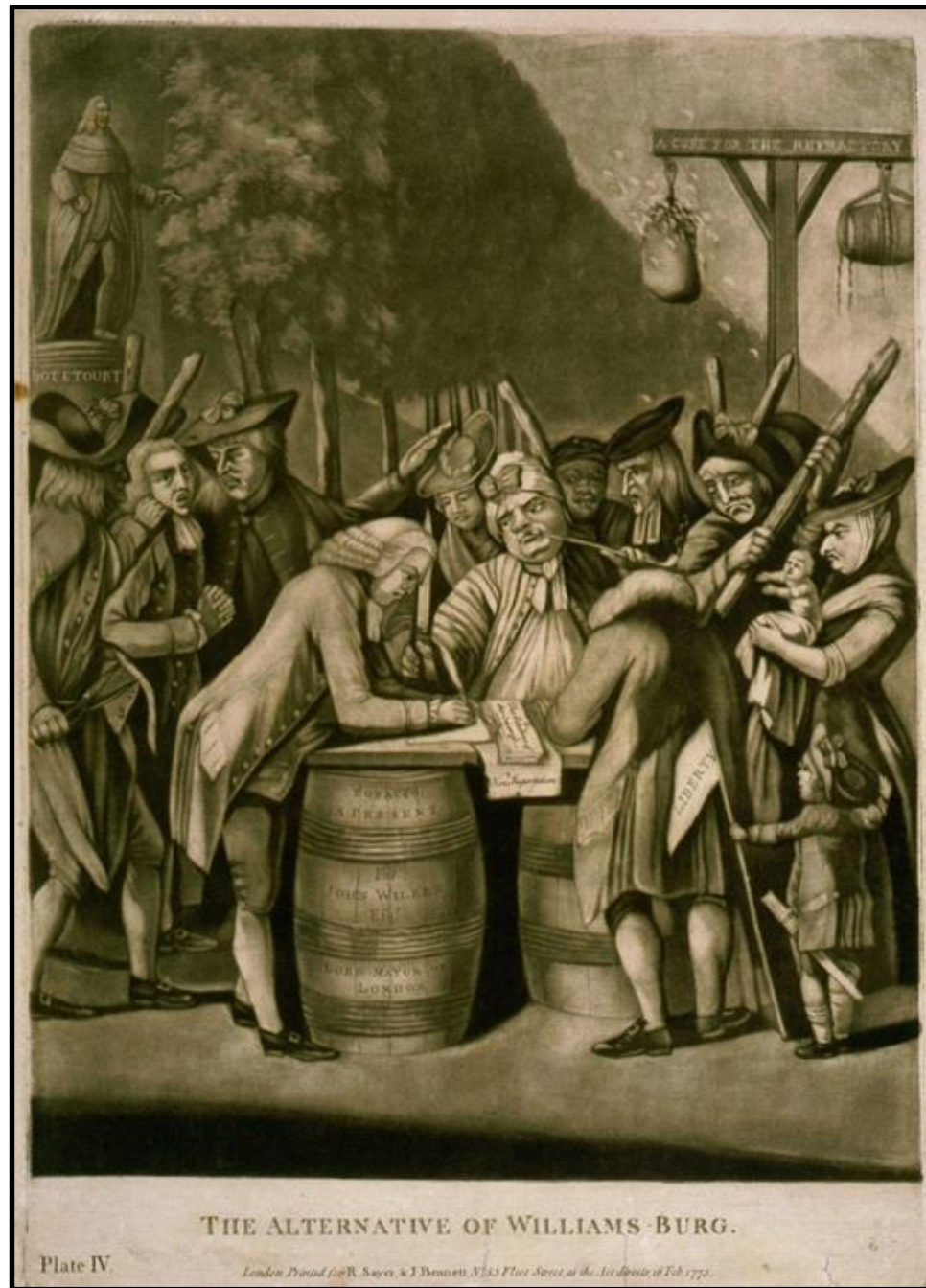


Figure 28: A cartoon image of a loyalist man being bullied into signing a document in support of the rebellion in Virginia. A rebel man urges the bullied man on with the butt of his gun while tar and feather hang from a post in the background labelled "A Cure for the Refractory." Militia-led intimidation was a significant factor in subduing opposition of the revolution and was used in all of the rebelling colonies. Image by Phillip Dawe (1775). Image courtesy of the United States Library of Congress.

One of the most successful rebel tactics was taking control of local authority and using it to determine people's loyalties and punish opposition.¹⁶ In all thirteen colonies Committees of Safety were formed as pseudo-governments and justice systems, much like the one for which Jacob Bayley headed in Newbury under New York's jurisdiction in 1776. The punishments these committees gave to opposers included arrest, relocation, confiscation of property, and public shaming. These served as official punishments, but the rebel cause also boasted the support of local militias and gangs who used other forms of intimidation, such as tarring and feathering, hanging of effigies, and destruction of property to bolster their cause.

In Vermont, anti-loyalist activity was at its height in 1777 after Burgoyne's surrender. It was during that time that Samuel Rose was found guilty of loyalty to the crown by Vermont's Committee of Safety and had his Manchester, VT property confiscated. On January 13, 1778 ten loyalists were dispatched from Bennington, VT and forced to march twenty miles through the snowy and icy Green Mountains to Wilmington, VT where they were then assigned hard labor. General Stark oversaw the execution of nine Tories in the Northern Department on May 16, 1779 and nine more on June 5, 1779. More than 100 loyalists were arrested under his command.¹⁷

¹⁶ On the rebels' takeovers of local authority, see: T. H. Breen, *American Insurgents, American Patriots: The Revolution of the People* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2011). The insurgents were regular farmers who succeeded in organizing resistance and taking over authority at the local levels. Breen also reveres their ability to restrain the violence used to do this and instead advocated legal (albeit biased) proceedings and social pressure over physical abuse. Breen suggests that it was these common insurgents who defined the revolution, more so than the leading founding fathers.

¹⁷ Mathews, *Frontier Spies*, 33.

One of the original intentions of Vermont's Committee of Safety was to raise revenue for the new state through confiscating and reselling properties. At the Windsor Convention in July 1777, the delegates agreed that "the property of tories within the state be seized and sold at public venue to furnish these sinews of war."¹⁸ Two courts were set up, one for each side of the Green Mountains. The courts west of the Green Mountains were very active. Greatly influenced by the Allens and Chittenden, they were used to oust New York supporters as well as British loyalists. Between March 1778 and February 1779, the western office confiscated seventy separate parcels of land. In contrast, during that same time, the eastern office confiscated only one. By the end of the war, over one hundred fifty properties were confiscated in Vermont. Throughout all the colonies, the number rose to over 5,000.¹⁹

Disputes between loyalties may have been more muted in the east than in the west, but that is not to say that they did not exist. As early as August 7, 1775 Newbury and Haverhill residents Colonel Asa Porter, John Taplin, David Weeks, and Jacob Fowler were arrested and brought to appear before the Committee of Safety of New Hampshire. Taplin, Weeks, and Fowler were released on bail, but Porter was sent to jail in Exeter, NH. Porter shortly returned to the Oxbow, and it was to him that local historian Wells attributed the relative peace in the area. Wells described Porter as the leader and most prominent of the local tories – a "humane and liberal" man who "forbade any

¹⁸ Mary Greene Nye, ed., *State Papers of Vermont: Sequestration, Confiscation and Sale of Estates.*, vol. 6 (Montpelier, VT: Rawson C. Myrick, 1941), 7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6:9–10. These numbers are just what was recorded by the 1783 British Parliamentary commission that was formed to overhear Loyalist claims of lost property in America.

violence...and knew how to lay a strong hand upon the lawlessness.”²⁰ Even if Porter was calming some of the animosity between sides, there were some who felt fervently for one side or the other. In 1780, reverend Peter Powers preached a sermon in Newbury entitled, “Tyranny & Toryism Exposed,” in which he claimed Tories and loyalists were “abandoned by God, friends of hell, companions of Satan, and enemies to the whole human species.”²¹ He warned his fellow citizens that they were surrounded by these very traitors. The accuracy of his claim on their numbers was somewhat proven when, in response to his sermon, Powers received numerous death threats and a reward was placed on his head in Canada.²² For contemporaries, it must have been hard to know whom to trust.

In addition to ardent loyalists, the residents of Newbury also knew numerous neighbors who worked for the British side once captured. Three of the men who were part of the party that captured Thomas Johnson fell into this category. Abner Barlow, John Gibson, and Levi Sylvester all joined Pritchard’s scouting unit after being captured, separately, while out hunting. Defecting to the British after being captured was not uncommon throughout the rebellious colonies, and was often forgiven if the soldier attempted to desert the British early on.

The story of Joseph Parker, a New Hampshire shoemaker and common foot soldier serving in Connecticut, is a wonderful example. Joseph Parker was captured by

²⁰ Wells, *History of Newbury, VT*, 85–6.

²¹ Peter Powers, *Tyranny and Toryism Exposed: Being the Substance of Two Sermons, Preached at Newbury, Lord’s Day, September 10th, 1780. By Peter Powers, A.M. Pastor of the Church in Said Newbury and Haverhill* (Westminster, VT: Spooner & Green, 1781).

²² Wells, *History of Newbury, VT*, 91.

the British while out with only one other American soldier to gather fresh provisions for his company. Parker had recently been so ill with putrid fever that he “remembered nothing that had passed for two months or more.”²³ At the time of his capture he had recovered somewhat from his sickness, but the threat of a prison ship, where he would be vulnerable to more diseases, inspired Parker to “offer” his services to the British army. He served with the British for a little over three weeks before he and eleven other American-soldiers-turned-redcoats, and one regular British soldier, started making plans to escape. About a week later, Parker and three others found just such an opportunity while out procuring some pigs for their unit.

Parker recounted his war experiences in his 1832 pension application. There are three things notable about his story. First, he made no apologies about his joining the British army, nor censored that part of the story. If Parker thought the truth was embarrassing or shameful, he had over fifty years to twist the story and place himself in a better light, but he didn't. Additionally, the 1830s was a time of high nationalism and romantic reminiscence about the War for Independence, so one would expect to hear stories of more clear-cut heroism, not questionable loyalty. He felt little need to justify his defection, especially because he was able to escape shortly after trading sides. He expected his testimony to be accepted without repercussions to himself or his legacy, and additionally, to receive reward, in the form of a pension, for his efforts.

Second, Parker was not the only one who defected. In his own recounting, there were eleven other men in his new British unit whose experience paralleled his own.

²³ John C. Dann, ed., *The Revolution Remembered: Eyewitness Accounts of the War for Independence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 68–71.

Another man who had a similar experience was Jonathan Elkins, the young man who was captured alongside Thomas Johnson. While approaching St. Johns, Elkins accepted an offer from Captain Pritchard for a position in the latter's scouting company.²⁴ He immediately made plans to escape with John Gibson and Abner Barlow, two of the men from Newbury who had helped to capture him. This plan failed because Elkins was ill the day it was to be enacted. It wasn't until another failed escape attempt was found out that Elkins was placed in a jail cell in Quebec and eventually shipped to England. According to statistics gathered from the three largest British prisons during the war, 8% of all captured American soldiers turned their coats.²⁵ That may not seem like a large percentage, but that amounted to between 800-2400 men. The true numbers may be even higher, as record keeping in these prisons was incomplete and what has survived to today is even less complete.

The third notable part of Parker's story is what happened after he escaped the British. Once free, Parker returned to his mother's house in Swanzey, NH. He never returned to his American military company, and his company never formally requested his return, even though they knew he was out of British hands and back home. In his 1832 pension application, Parker stated that his reason for not returning to the American military was his fear of being caught again by the British, for then he would be executed as a deserter. He always assumed that was why his officers never requested his return either. Parker's understanding of his officers' actions, or lack of actions, illustrates that

²⁴ Elkins, "Reminiscences of Jonathan Elkins," 195–204.

²⁵ Lemisch, "Listening to the 'Inarticulate,'" 7, 17.

there was a grey area of loyalty that was accepted in the American army during the Revolutionary War. Parker's officers did not expect him to stand for the American cause since he was at a greater risk than other soldiers. Once captured, it was recognized that Parker was compromised in a way that required special accommodation.

Like Parker's officers, the residents near the Oxbow did not punish John Gibson for being in the party that captured Thomas Johnson and Jonathan Elkins after Gibson returned home in 1781.²⁶ They did not blame Gibson for defecting in order to avoid the atrocious conditions of the British prisons, nor did they find him guilty of worsening Johnson's situation. Presumably, it was recognized that Gibson did not have the power to stop Johnson's capture, and since he did not participate in any actively aggressive way, and escaped when able, no punishment was deemed necessary. For those espousing patriot beliefs, there was some flexibility allowed in aligning one's actions with that belief.

The limits of such flexibility, however, are heightened by another of the Newbury residents who was present at Johnson's capture. In addition to being part of the raiding party that captured Johnson, Levi Sylvester carried intelligence between the Oxbow and Canada after Johnson returned home on parole. Suspicions that likely arose from that activity was not what turned his former neighbors in Newbury against him, though. It was not until they received testimony from the convicted spy in Albany that named Sylvester as a true supporter of the British cause that Newbury patriots turned against him. That

²⁶ Elkins, "Reminiscences of Jonathan Elkins," 196–7. John Gibson escaped by pretending to be drunk and claiming to go to the next town to buy more rum. The plan involved 5 other men, who pretended to be suspicious that Gibson would desert and claimed to follow him to make sure he didn't. The six deserters rented a canoe from a French man, then "took to the woods." 6 days after leaving St. Johns, they arrived in Peacham and told Deacon Elkins that Jonathan would escape as soon as he recovered from his illness.

testimony, coupled with Sylvester's active violence in firing the shot that broke the man's arm in Jacob Bayley's house, made the rebels of Newbury and Haverhill wish that they could capture and punish him.²⁷

Perhaps another limit on the flexibility of defection was officer status. Since the entire culture of gentleman officers revolved around the consistency of honor, a gentleman's promise could not be compromised without compromising his status. Perhaps that is why Johnson faced more negative suspicion for working with the British than did Gibson. However, since Johnson's officer status was relatively low and was not generated from the nation but from the state, he was able to take advantage of some of the flexibility that was allowed to other soldiers.

The flexibility given in showing one's loyalty was also seen in the acceptance of oaths that people were forced to swear while under military occupation. Both patriot and British forces made residents within their areas of influence swear their loyalty. The rebels started using loyalty oaths during the boycotts that preceded the war. In Virginia, for example, all free white males had to swear loyalty to the United States or pay triple

²⁷ Dowe, "Letter from Moses Dowe to Mehech Weare, June 16, 1782."

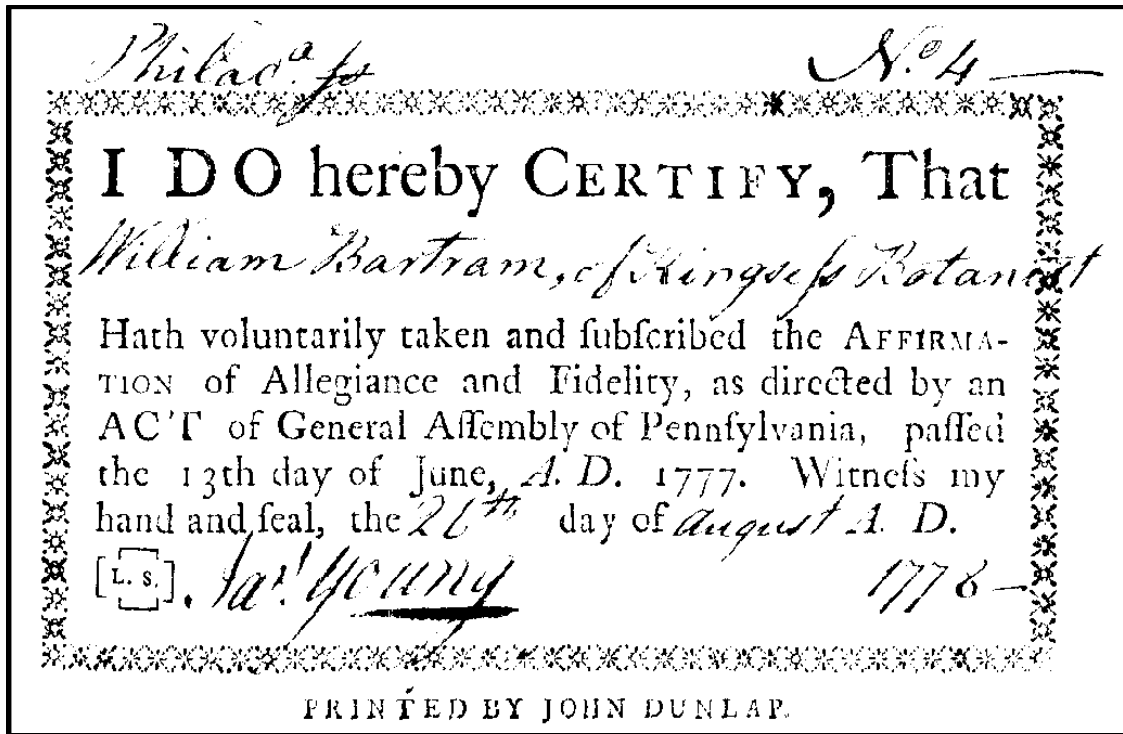


Figure 29: Loyalty oath of William Bartram of Pennsylvania. Both sides made citizens swear oaths of allegiance during the American Revolution, but their formality was never enforced, making the declaration of one's loyalty a fickle thing. Image courtesy of Early American Imprints.

the taxes.²⁸ When the raiding party from Canada retreated after failing to capture Jacob Bayley, they forced the residents of Corinth, VT swear allegiance to the king.²⁹

Oaths, however, were used more to establish the authority of the oath-givers than to inventory and establish the loyalty of the people.³⁰ Civilian oaths of loyalty were not given much weight, especially when sworn en masse. After the war, exiled loyalists who

²⁸ Don Higginbotham, *The War of American Independence: Military Attitudes, Policies, and Practice, 1763-1789* (Easton Press, 1971), 270.

²⁹ Dowe, "Letter from Moses Dowe to Mehech Weare, June 16, 1782."

³⁰ Royster, *A Revolutionary People At War*, 105–6.

applied to the British government for compensation of losses due to the war were not excluded if they had taken an oath of loyalty to the rebel cause.³¹ Similarly, no one from Corinth, VT was compromised because they pledge themselves to the king when the British raiding party visited en route to Canada with James Bayley. Civilians tended to resent these forced expressions of loyalty so much that sometimes they succeeded in reducing their use. During the winter of 1777-1778 George Washington sent out soldiers to imprison those who were not loyal to the rebel cause, but the residents around Trenton complained so much that Washington rescinded his orders.³² When it came to choosing between one's survival, or sometimes even just one's comfort, and upholding patriotic rhetoric, most civilians' chose self-interest.³³ This was often accepted by their peers as something different than treason. Johnson's officer status did not give him as much freedom to take oaths of loyalty for either side, but his prisoner-of-war status made his parole oath to the British acceptable to many who knew of it.

Treason was hard to define during the revolution. Congress had little power to enforce any legislation regarding the matter, so states were left to define it themselves. New Jersey, New York, and Delaware deferred to English common law which generally limited treason to acts of deference to the pope over the English monarch, counterfeiting, and other acts directly against the king, his heirs, and the line of succession. Of course, without a king, this made the definition of treason even more nebulous for the rebelling

³¹ Brown, *The Good Americans*, 38.

³² Higginbotham, *The War of American Independence*, 269–70.

³³ Royster, *A Revolutionary People At War*, 175.

states that used English precedent. Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and Connecticut embraced a much broader definition that included even trade with the enemy. Almost all states also recognized crimes that were less than treason but still objectionable, including expressing hostility to the revolution and discouraging Continental Army enlistments. What was considered a crime and how severely it was punished fluctuated over time, with increased local threat leading to lower tolerance and increased severity.³⁴ If Johnson's dramatic unravelling had occurred at a more defining moment in the Northern Department, perhaps in the fall of 1777 as Burgoyne penetrated the region, it is likely both sides would have been quicker to prosecute and punish.

Defining treason for the rebels' intelligence gatherers, especially endorsed double agents, proved even more fickle than for the general population. Despite many efforts by John Jay, a leading New York politician and President of the Continental Congress from 1778-1779, the rebels never centralized their intelligence-gathering. Jay was successful in creating and heading the Committee and First Commission for Detecting Conspiracies, but its reach was limited to New York's Hudson Valley, and the project was short-lived. In its place, and ever-present elsewhere during the war, local institutions made up their own rules.³⁵ Therefore, Johnson's fate was to be decided by the men he knew around him, in both Newbury and in Canada.

Because the war was a civil war on the ground, because the definition of treason was so elusive, and because the power to prosecute was held locally, accusations and

³⁴ Higginbotham, *The War of American Independence*, 268–71.

³⁵ Kenneth Daigler, *Spies, Patriots, and Traitors: American Intelligence in the Revolutionary War* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2014), 112–3.

punishments of treason were often influenced by personal and political disagreements. For example, when Thomas Johnson called the Allen brothers “infernal villians” for negotiating a peace with Haldimand, it must be remembered than Johnson was also good friends and politically allied with Jacob Bayley, who had earlier reviled the Allens as “avowed enemies to the cause of Christ.”³⁶ Even James Lovell, who passed on Bayley’s accusations of the Allen brothers’ treason in 1782 to General George Washington, acknowledged that “a very high degree of jealousy possesses the heart of my Correspondent concerning the insincerity of some of the Cabinet Council of Vermont in their present conduct towards Congress. This Jealousy manifest in every conversation which I have had with him.”³⁷ Lovell believed the information was still worth conveying to the Commander in Chief, but the context of antagonistic personal relations was also worth the general’s consideration.

The fallout of the attempted capture of Bayley, in the summer of 1782, was not the first time that the confusion around treason and its entanglement with personal conflicts affected Thomas Johnson. Following Johnson’s capture the previous year, a group of men cried foul to justify helping themselves to the stock on Johnson’s store shelves.³⁸ Just two days after Johnson was carried off, a small militia group under the

³⁶ “Letter from Thomas Johnson to George Washington, September 20, 1782”; Bayley, “An Address Commemorative of Jacob Bayley.”

³⁷ “Letter from James Lovell to George Washington, March 11, 1782” (Boston, MA), Johnson Papers DOCS 574: 20, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.

³⁸ Wells, *History of Newbury, VT*, 95–6; “Depositions of Samuel Young and Rueben Sanborn on March 1781 Incident at Thomas Johnson’s House, C. 1781,” Johnson Papers DOC 574: 76.2, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.

direction of Captain Azariah Webb stormed the west wing of Johnson's home, where the store was located.

Webb's group claimed that Johnson was a traitor who planned his own capture, and that, therefore, he no longer had claim to his stock. Seeing the futility in denying the armed mob, a hired man named Whitaker offered to retrieve the key to avoid damaging the door, but Webb was either too impatient or didn't trust the man because he rammed open the door with his shoulder before Whitaker returned. According to an eyewitness, Webb and his men drank Johnson's rum right out of the barrels, ate his sugar by the handfuls, and slung to the floor and trampled on his cotton wool, all while cursing and abusing his name. The witness believed that the mob's only goal was to access the supplies, and that they "Seemed Determined to youes them att their one Discretion."³⁹ The destruction was slowed down when the witness took the cock from which they were drinking and sat on top of the sugar barrel lids, but it was not stopped completely until the militia from Haverhill crossed the river to defend Johnson's property.

Webb's attack may have truly been inspired by a belief in Johnson's treason, but then why didn't he search Johnson's house for papers that could prove his guilt and why didn't Webb interrogate Johnson's wife and children? The fact that he and his men headed straight for the liquor and the sugar suggests that they were more motivated by self-gratification than by justice. In *History of Newbury*, Wells recalls that Webb and Johnson had not been getting on for some while, but that no one remembered why. Wells also attributed some general dislike for Johnson to his financial success. Perhaps Webb

³⁹ "Deposition of Samuel Young and Rueben Sanborn."

was jealous of Johnson's rise, or perhaps Webb felt that Johnson had cheated him on a deal, much like the matriarch who requested Johnson pay her more for her husband's land. By stealing Johnson's stock, Webb may have felt he was making fair an early financial transaction. Thomas Johnson, however, certainly felt that the attack was unwarranted. A few months after returning home on parole, he wrote to Webb and politely demanded an explanation. Further, Johnson reprimanded Webb for acting as a poor role model. As an officer, Johnson claimed, Webb "ought to have sett a better Example."⁴⁰ While defending his reputation as a patriot, Johnson recalled his reliability based on gentility. Johnson's polite and respectful tone, though strong, reminded Webb that Johnson was a gentleman, so his word could be trusted as evidence of his loyalty.

The next attack on Johnson's loyalty would not be so easily dealt with, for the accusers were greater in numbers and in reputation than Captain Webb. It was also more delicate, as the attack came from both sides. In anger over the capture of James Bayley the night that his father alluded capture, the Bayley clan accused Johnson of treason against the rebels. At the same time, the Bayley family and friends offered the British evidence of Johnson's disloyalty to the king's cause in exchange for James's freedom and return home. Between Johnson and the Bayleys, the layers of betrayal and double-dealings are thick.

According to British Captain Justus Sherwood, this rift between Thomas Johnson and Jacob Bayley was caused by Johnson giving Bayley the wrong time of the attack on his house. Pritchard told Johnson that the kidnapping would occur at midnight, under the

⁴⁰ "Letter from Thomas Johnson to Azariah Webb, December 25, 1781" (Newbury, VT), Johnson Papers DOC 574: 13, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.

cover of darkness, similar to the way in which Johnson was taken a little more than a year before. But after Mr. White, a local loyalist helping the raiding party, found out that Johnson was acquainted with the plan, he insisted that the attack be pushed up to dusk. Mr. White did not trust Johnson's loyalty to the British and convinced the party to refrain from informing Johnson of the time change. After the event, Sherwood believed that "Bailey has since accus'd Johnson of treachery for not acquainting him of the Right hour the assault was to be made."⁴¹ Sherwood's account makes sense, for it would explain why there was only one sentry at Bayley's door at dusk, and why James Bayley was strolling the streets barefoot and carefree with enemies so close by.

The Bayleys did not wait long after James was captured to show their displeasure and distrust of Johnson. Just two days after the kidnapping, Johnson was awakened for the second time in less than two years by military officers at his door in the early hours of the morning. This time, though, he was not captured by the enemy, but arrested by his colleagues in the Vermont militia. He was taken to the Council of Safety in Haverhill, NH to answer charges of treason put forth by Captain John G. Bayley. Captain Bayley accused Johnson of helping plan the attack that attempted to capture the captain's first-cousin, General Jacob Bayley, and succeeded in capturing the captain's son-in-law, James Bayley. As a result, Johnson faced several weeks house arrest as punishment.⁴²

⁴¹ "Letter from Justus Sherwood to Robert Mathews (February 13, 1783; Loyal Blockhouse, VT)," in *Haldimand Papers: Correspondence with Various Offices Relating to the Exchange of Prisoners and to Vermont, 1778-1784*, vol. 178, B (Ottawa, Canada, 1985), 76.

⁴² There is only one record that mentions Johnson's arrest, trial, and punishment by the rebels on June 17, 1782. Even though it is not mentioned elsewhere, it is corroborated by evidence that the Bayleys did other acts to accuse Johnson of treason. Without further evidence of the trial itself, we will never know exactly what happened or if it happened, but it is likely Johnson was at least arrested and for the reasons Wells suggests: Wells, *History of Newbury, VT*, 101–2.

Unfortunately, the provenance and current state of the trial's records are unknown, so the details of the examination of Johnson's loyalty are a mystery. In *History of Newbury*, Wells suggests that General Jacob Bayley secretly got the charges dropped, but does not include his source of this information. In fact, there is evidence that suggests the contrary – that General Bayley was working against Johnson in this matter, or at least not helping Johnson defend himself. Further, which court held the trial is unknown. The New Hampshire Committee of Safety usually met in Exeter, not in Haverhill.⁴³ In June of 1782, however, many New Hampshire towns along the Connecticut River, including Haverhill, were annexed by Vermont as a second Eastern Union.⁴⁴ Much like the first Eastern Union, it was not recognized by most authorities outside Vermont, but, since it was recognized by the residents of Haverhill and by the state of Vermont, perhaps the regional Committee of Safety for Vermont met in Haverhill at the time.

As with many accusations of treason during the war, a history of contentious personal relationships flavored the Bayleys' allegations against Johnson. Even though General Jacob Bayley had served as friend and father-figure to Thomas Johnson since the latter's young adulthood, Johnson's relationship with the Bayley family was strained during the Revolutionary War. As early as 1780, Johnson told Sherwood that he and Bayley had "not been on a good footing...through the course of last summer."⁴⁵ It

⁴³ "Committee of Safety in New-Hampshire, From 1776 to 1784," in *Collections of the New Hampshire Historical Society: Volume II* (Concord, NH: Jacob B. Moore, 1827).

⁴⁴ Sherman, Sessions, and Potash, *Freedom and Unity*, 114–6.

⁴⁵ "Letter from Justus Sherwood to Robert Mathews (March 10, 178; Loyal Blockhouse, VT)," in *Haldimand Papers: Correspondence with Various Offices Relating to the Exchange of Prisoners and to Vermont, 1778-1784*, vol. 178, B (Ottawa, Canada, 1985). Of course, Johnson likely told this to Sherwood

appears that the cause of the rift was Johnson's relationship with Bayley's sons.

According to an account that Johnson wrote probably about the same time as the drama between him and the Bayleys escalated, the general's sons were jealous of the attention Johnson received from their father.⁴⁶ Johnson, though older than the sons, was closer in age to them than to the general himself. It would make sense for Bayley's sons to feel that the friendship, political favors, and financial support their father gave to Johnson came at their present and future expense.

Three of Bayley's sons – Joshua, Jacob Jr., and John, aged 29, 27, and 17 in 1782, respectively – were particular nuisances for Johnson. The latter recorded that the three wreaked havoc on his property by hiding Johnson's tools and pulling down his fence. These “nasty Dirty tricks” were accompanied by “all the Lies that Could Bee invented.”⁴⁷ Johnson timed the escalation of this hostility to the start of the Revolutionary War, when the young men tried to “Set the Solders against me.” After the summer of 1782, when their brother James was taken to Canada, the three grown Bayley sons continued to harass Johnson by exclaiming him an “old torey and einemy to my Contary.” Johnson described their molestations as being sent by Satan and the “Divil.” The sons were eventually successful in pulling their father away from Thomas Johnson, because Johnson recalled that Bayley “treated me Vary Well til his Sons Began to grow up.”

to prove distance between himself and the rebel leader in an attempt to gain the British Captain's trust, but it appears that the truth worked better than a lie in this case.

⁴⁶ “Thomas Johnson's Account of Relationship between General Bayley, Bayley Family and Thomas Johnson, C. 1782.”

⁴⁷ Ibid.

The climax of Bayley's sons' enmity towards Johnson also coincided with divergent financial changes for both Johnson and Bayley. As Johnson's fortunes rose, Bayley increasingly resorted to mortgaging his estates to pay for military supplies for the rebellion. One of the expectations of being a gentleman was that one had to front the pay for the troops and other public positions in one's care. The state would then refund those expenses. Finances, however, were arguably the least organized aspect of the Revolutionary War's shaky logistics. Dramatic inflation and over thirteen different currencies circulating throughout the new United States resulted in disastrous outcomes. In one Newbury man's case, a bill of \$4,437 in expenses loaned in 1781 for the war resulted in only \$63.44 by the time of repayment.⁴⁸ Jacob Bayley suffered worse. Bayley invested approximately \$60,000 in the rebellion, which he never saw returned.⁴⁹ As early as 1777, while still under New York command, Bayley explained his financial difficulty to his superiors:

I am continually employed in the Service, but have no Pay, and am willing as long as I can live without Begging – the time is now come... I must Desire you to consider my Case – and grant me relief by paying the roll.⁵⁰

By the end of the war, Bayley had mortgaged most of his land and was a poor man.

Johnson, on the other hand, had surpassed his former benefactor as the richest man in Newbury.

⁴⁸ Wells, *History of Newbury, VT*, 121.

⁴⁹ Bayley, "An Address Commemorative of Jacob Bayley," 35.

⁵⁰ "Letter from Jacob Bayley to New York Provincial Congress, February 26, 1777". Printed in: Wells, *History of Newbury, VT*, 80.

It is not unlikely that Bayley, or at least his sons, felt bitter at the reversal of their financial status. The sons may have watched indignantly as their inheritance dwindled down while one of their father's most successful investments – Thomas Johnson – remained inconvertible to cash. Perhaps General Bayley lost faith in Thomas Johnson's loyalty to the rebellion in part because Johnson did not appear to sacrifice as much, at least not as much money, for the cause. The real motivations of people long gone will never be fully known, but economic and social concerns can be highly influential.

After Johnson's Committee of Safety trial resulted only in the punitive punishment of house arrest, the Bayleys concocted another scheme. Instead of rebel-inflicted justice, they aimed for what mattered most – getting James Bayley home. They hoped to do so by turning Johnson in to the British authorities for double-dealing, and they enlisted the help of various community members through a mixture of trust, bribes, and threats.

Within just a few weeks of James's capture, the Bayleys sent men to Canada to testify that it was Johnson who warned General Jacob Bayley of the attack in June. One of these men was Thomas Chamberlain, a friend so close to the general that he named his first son Jacob Bayley.⁵¹ Chamberlain stayed in Canada through the fall, speaking out against Johnson.⁵² The Bayleys also employed (by means of threats) Joseph White, the loyalist who had served as a scout for the British when they attempted to capture the

⁵¹ Ibid., 499.

⁵² The start of Thomas Chamberlain's mission in Canada is given as July by Er Chamberlain. Various other accounts place him there through the rest of the summer and fall. "Er Chamberlain's Testimony Against the Bayleys Given to Thomas Johnson, January 1783," Johnson Papers DOC 574:42, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.

general. After delivering James Bayley to Canada, White wanted to return home to Newbury, but the Bayley family promised to disrupt his homecoming if he returned before James did.⁵³ White travelled back and forth between Canada and Newbury to deliver to Captain John Bayley intelligence regarding the position and trust of Johnson with the British.⁵⁴

The Bayleys also intercepted Johnson's messenger and lured him to their side with the promise of money and claims of justice. After Levi Sylvester was compromised and recalled permanently to Canada, Abel Davis took his place delivering correspondence between Johnson and British officers. Davis, a lukewarm loyalist and resident of Peacham, was kidnapped by Native Americans, against British orders, just before Sylvester was exposed. The British military was quick to arrange his return home, but decided to take advantage of the timing by tasking him with the newly open job of messenger. Davis wasn't given much opportunity to refuse. He returned to Peacham in August, but not long after, he received notice that he was ordered to go back to Canada to testify to Johnson's trustworthiness. Davis was unsure how to proceed. Johnson was out of town at the time and unable to advise, so Davis turned to the Bayleys for assistance. Davis requested an audience with General Jacob Bayley and received Captain John Bayley in response. The captain tried to persuade Davis that Johnson was truly a traitor to the British and advised Davis to "Let Johnson go to Hell and be Damned."⁵⁵ Further,

⁵³ "Thomas Johnson's Account of Events November 15, 1782," Johnson Papers DOC 574:42, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.

⁵⁴ "Er Chamberlain's Testimony Against the Bayleys Given to Thomas Johnson, January 1783."

⁵⁵ "Abel Davis's Testimony Against the Bayleys Given to Thomas Johnson on January 13, 1783" (Peacham, VT), Johnson Papers DOC 574:42, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.

Captain Bayley arranged for Davis to deliver all future correspondence to and from Thomas Johnson to a man named Er Chamberlain, who was to pass it on to the Bayleys.⁵⁶ Er Chamberlain – no known relation to Thomas Chamberlain – was approached by the Bayleys as early as July to assist in their plans against Johnson, but his role as the middle man in collecting Johnson’s mail was his first real assignment. Another man, named Joseph Page, was employed to watch Davis and make sure he delivered all letters to the Bayleys.⁵⁷

With how much of this operation was General Jacob Bayley complicit? Captain John Bayley claimed Jacob Bayley’s authority in all he did, but he may have been using the general’s name without the general’s full permission. Only one of the accounts given later to Johnson directly referenced the general’s participation in the plot against the double-agent. For example, when Davis requested an audience with the general, he got the captain instead. Another man who told Johnson in January 1783 that General Bayley warned him that Johnson was “a very Bad man,” admitted later in the conversation that the message was actually delivered by Captain John Bayley, presumably on behalf of the general.⁵⁸ The claim given to Johnson that the general advised his son James to “Swear against Johnson... and Com hom him self” was similarly given by Captain John Bayley. The account given by Jacob Page of his enlistment to enforce Davis’s compliance is the

⁵⁶ “Er Chamberlain’s Testimony Against the Bayleys Given to Thomas Johnson, January 1783.”

⁵⁷ “Thomas Johnson’s Account of Events December 24, 1782-January 4, 1783,” Johnson Papers DOC 574:42, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

sole narrative that was given to Johnson that placed the general in person for any of the events.

In a letter that Johnson would have never seen, General Bayley's collaboration with the British is identified by Captain Justus Sherwood. Sherwood claimed that General Bayley "says that Johnson meant to save Pritchard, & keep friends on both sides."⁵⁹ But, how Bayley "says" this to Sherwood is not elaborated on. It is unlikely General Bayley visited Sherwood in person. If the message was delivered through a messenger, likely Thomas Chamberlain or Joseph White, then how do we know that it reflected General Bayley's thoughts and not simply the messenger's? Sherwood certainly believed General Bayley's authority was behind the accusation, and the general must have endorsed it to some degree for it to pass believably with his authority, but the exact degree of his complicity remains a mystery.

There is also evidence that suggests General Bayley did not want to ruin Johnson completely. Two weeks after the attack on his house, Bayley sent a description of it to General Washington in which he claimed that Johnson not only warned him of the attack, but that Johnson continued to give him information of the British plans with Vermont.⁶⁰ Bayley did not try to convince Washington that Johnson was a traitor. Further, as the conspiracy to prove Johnson's disloyalty to the British grew, Er Chamberlain requested permission to warn Johnson of the true amount of danger he was in but Captain Bayley

⁵⁹ "Letter from Justus Sherwood to Robert Mathews (February 13, 1783; Loyal Blockhouse, VT)."

⁶⁰ "Letter from Jacob Bayley to George Washington, June 29, 1782."

told him that General Bayley had already done so.⁶¹ The captain may have been lying to Chamberlain, but perhaps the general truly had warned Johnson. General Jacob Bayley may have believed that plotting Johnson's downfall was a necessary evil to getting his son back from Canada. Perhaps the general half-heartedly approved of the conspiracy against Johnson, but his friendship with the target made him reluctant to participate actively. Of course, General Bayley may have been much more enthusiastic about the proceedings but left Captain Bayley and others to the dirty work so his own reputation would be unstained. According to Johnson's brother-in-law, the general denied any such action against Johnson, but believed that Johnson was suspected in Canada of helping the general escape capture by his very own bragging to a woman named Mrs. McClane who told "Evry body That Came into her hous."⁶² While Johnson's ego and loose lips may have factored into the suspicions against him, the evidence that the Bayleys were feeding the British evidence against Johnson is undeniable, and it is highly unlikely that the conspiracy could have been going on without the general's knowledge. General Jacob Bayley must have given some amount of approval to the plans, or at least little resistance.

The complicity of Captain John Bayley and Jacob Bayley Jr is much clearer, however. Captain John Bayley is given the role of chief instigator in all accounts. He had a motive, as well. Not only was Captain Bayley first cousins with General Bayley, but James Bayley, the general's twenty-five year old son who was captured by the British on

⁶¹ "Er Chamberlain's Testimony Against the Bayleys Given to Thomas Johnson, January 1783."

⁶² "Thomas Johnson's Account of Events December 24, 1782-January 4, 1783." Johnson's brother-in-law, Dudley Carleton was told this by Jacob Bayley on November 23, 1782, but did not tell Johnson until January 3, 1783.

June 15, 1782 and taken to Canada, was married to Captain Bayley's seventeen year old daughter, Sarah. Captain Bayley was fighting for the return of his son-in-law. Jacob Bayley Jr., who was just two years older than his brother James, was also recorded as being actively against Johnson after James was captured. According to Abel Davis, when Jacob Jr. and Davis ran into each other at the general store, Jacob told Davis that the only way to get James home was "to swear against Johnson," whom he called "a Damn rogue."⁶³ The young man then proceeded to "pick a quarrel" with Davis that led to physical violence. When Davis accused Jacob of breaking his leg, Jacob replied that "he wishd it had been my neck then I could not go to Canada no more Serving the Devil." The fight was only broken up when the storekeeper intervened.

The accounts of the imprisoned James Bayle's participation in the plans set forth by his father-in-law, brothers, and perhaps father, are contradictory. Abel Davis told Johnson that while he was in Canada "Jack Baley" urged him to testify to the British authorities against Johnson in order to obtain James' freedom.⁶⁴ However, James refused to place direct suspicion on Johnson when first interrogated, according to the records kept by the British officials. He claimed that his father was never directly warned by Johnson of the impending attack, but grew suspicious when he saw Johnson riding into the woods while ill.⁶⁵

⁶³ "Abel Davis's Testimony Against the Bayleys Given to Thomas Johnson on January 13, 1783."

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Mathews, *Frontier Spies*, 76.

The conspiracy against Johnson was not an exiguous affair. The list of those who knew about it includes Captain John Bayley, General Jacob Bayley, Jacob Bayley Jr., James Bayley, Thomas Chamberlain, Joseph White, Er Chamberlain, Abel Davis, Joseph Page, local loyalists Jonathan Fowler and Mr. and Mrs. John McClane, Johnson's brother-in-law Dudley Carleton, Newbury prominent citizen Moses Dow, and an unknown by the name of Mr. Osmore. This dispersion was not unlike the list of those who were aware of Johnson's double agency, which included those previously mentioned plus Johnson's brother-in-law William Wallace, prominent New Hampshire and Massachusetts politicians James Lovell, Meshech Weare, William Heath, and Nathaniel Peabody, and Commander in Chief George Washington. In both cases, the cooperation of so many, especially of dignitaries such as General Jacob Bayley and General George Washington, gave authority to the participants' actions and helped blur the line between betrayal and loyalty.

The accusations against Johnson that the Bayleys and their conspirators gave in Canada served only to deepen suspicions against Johnson's loyalty to the crown, not initiate them. Three days after failing in his attack on General Bayley's house, Captain Pritchard received a note from one of the prisoners his troop had picked up on their retreat to Canada. It offered information as to "how it happened the Party was in part Defeated at Newbury" in exchange for "acknowledgement of favours."⁶⁶ The author probably expected either a release from imprisonment or at least better treatment while imprisoned in exchange for this information. The note implied that General Bayley had

⁶⁶ Ibid., 75.

been warned by someone the British trusted. It ended with the warning that “Treachery is so much in fashion it is Dangerous Trusting friends Capt. Pritchard knows,” and was signed “Vermont Boy.” This started the investigation to find out who warned Bayley, the investigation for which Abel Davis was recalled to Canada soon after returning home, to testify to Johnson’s involvement.

When Johnson found out about the investigation of his loyalty and conduct, most likely from Davis in September or October, he wrote a letter to Canada in his defense. He reminded Haldimand and Pritchard that he had to keep up “appearances of Frindship” with the rebels in order to obtain intelligence for the British.⁶⁷ He let them know that he was aware of a plan laid by Captain John Bayley “To give False Evidence against me and Deliver me up To you For their Son,” James Bayley. Further, Johnson reminded the military officers that he could have at any time informed the rebels of the movements of British scouts and spies and gotten them arrested, but he had not. Instead, he pointed out how he loyally provided supplies for said scouts. Lastly, to prove his usefulness, he gave them new intelligence on the state of rebellion in New England and rumors of who was about to desert the British army in Canada.

The only other time Johnson took time in his correspondence to reply to the accusations against him was when he suggested that Thomas Chamberlain was only vilifying him because Captain John Bayley had bullied Chamberlain into it. Johnson proposed pity for Chamberlain, whom Johnson believed was “so Easily Fritted that he is

⁶⁷ “Letter from Thomas Johnson to British in Canada, C. November 1782,” Johnson Papers DOC 574: 37, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.

not worth Notis.”⁶⁸ Otherwise, none of the subsequent letters that Johnson sent to Canada in the last half of 1782 were written defensively. Johnson carried on as if his loyalty had been unquestioned. In July, after Sylvester was decommissioned and before Davis was assigned the role of messenger, Johnson sent newspapers and intelligence through a local loyalist named Jonathan Fowler. In September Johnson suggested that “The Cheif Talk hear is a bout Peace,” and so Vermonters might be soon ready for reconciliation with Great Britain.⁶⁹ He retracted that theory, though, in October. Due to a British victory over the French fleet in the West Indies, which incited the public, “Peace...hath Vanished as the Dew before the Sun.”⁷⁰ Johnson also continued his work helping the British by assisting their loyalist scouts and informers with supplies. On September 13, 1782 Johnson was tasked with helping Mrs. McClane, a loyalist from the Newbury area, get to Canada to join her husband who recently relocated there to be an informant.⁷¹

Despite testimonies that named Johnson as the betrayer, many of the British authorities continued to trust him. Pritchard was reluctant to abandon faith in Johnson, whom he believed “behaved as a Friend ought” the night of Bayley’s intended capture.⁷² Dr. George Smyth, Pritchard’s superior, believed in “Johnson’s sincerity, and willingness to serve us.” Smyth accepted James Bayley’s version of events – that he warned his

⁶⁸ “Letter from Thomas Johnson to British in Canada, October 23, 1782,” Johnson Papers DOC 574: 36, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.

⁶⁹ “Letter from Thomas Johnson to British in Canada, September 1782,” Johnson Papers DOC 574: 32, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.

⁷⁰ “Letter from Thomas Johnson to British in Canada, October 23, 1782.”

⁷¹ “Letter from Thomas Johnson to George Washington, September 20, 1782.”

⁷² Captain Pritchard and Dr. George Smyth, as quoted in: Mathews, *Frontier Spies*, 76.

father when he happened to see Johnson riding off of the road and into the woods. Smyth concluded that “Colo Johnston is not to blame.”

Johnson may not have known during these initial months the extent of the Bayley’s plans against him, but he knew for some years that he was disliked by the Bayley sons and not fully trusted by many under their influence. As early as September, Johnson somehow became aware of an association between his messenger, Abel Davis, and the Bayleys. He accused Davis of disloyalty in a letter dated September 1, 1782, right after Davis went to the Bayleys for advice on testifying in Canada. Johnson was shocked that Davis “indangred my Life and my all... by your unprudance in informing The Bayleys.”⁷³ The letter reminded Davis that Johnson helped him get home after he was taken to Canada by Native Americans just a few months ago, so his alliance with the Bayleys was “as Cruel and ungreatful as the Grave To me.” Johnson presented the conditions for his forgiveness: “you Shall Not go To nor Speak To The Bayleys During the Present Situation of A Fares... not one word of information Shall you give To a new Person....I will yet have you if you will be Trew To me.” In early fall Johnson may have only suspected plotting by the Bayleys, but by mid-autumn he was delivered the details.

Er Chamberlain confessed the whole conspiracy, or as much as he knew of it, to Johnson on November 15, 1782. His confession implicated Abel Davis, Captain John Bayley, Thomas Chamberlain, and Joseph White of taking bribes to testify against Johnson in Canada, which put Johnson’s life “in the greatest Danger.”⁷⁴ Of course, Er

⁷³ “Letter from Thomas Johnson to Abel Davis, September 1, 1782” (Newbury, VT), Johnson Papers DOC 574: 31, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.

⁷⁴ “Thomas Johnson’s Account of Events November 15, 1782.”

Chamberlain had helped put Johnson there as well, but claimed that he changed his mind for reasons of morality. Chamberlain told Johnson that his “Conscience had Smote him For Som Time So That he Cold Not Rest easy” after “he Found that I was So a bused.”⁷⁵

Johnson must have immediately confronted Davis concerning the accusations Chamberlain told him on the 15th because Davis wrote back defiantly on the 17th. Davis claimed that he was never offered money to swear against Johnson, and that he is “not so Siley a man” as that.⁷⁶ He invoked his deity to proclaim his loyalty to Johnson – “god knows that I wold not Hurt you if it ware In my Power” – but did admit that he knew of men who were “trying to ruin you or I am misinformed.”

Alarmed at the danger he was in in his own hometown, Johnson fled to the Continental army camp at Newburgh, New York in an attempt to end his delicate situation once and for all. Johnson plead his case before General Washington and requested a prisoner exchange so as to relieve him of all obligation to the British in Canada and, because it would come from the authority of the Commander in Chief, publicly confirm his loyalty to the new republic. He set out on November 20, 1782, just five days after Chamberlain confessed the Bayley conspiracy to him.⁷⁷ Johnson reached Hampton Falls on the coast of New Hampshire at least by November 25th. Johnson chose this route, which was not as direct as heading down the Connecticut River, to reach out to prominent acquaintances who could provide him with an

⁷⁵ “Er Chamberlain’s Testimony Against the Bayleys Given to Thomas Johnson, January 1783.”

⁷⁶ “Letter from Thomas Johnson to Abel Davis, September 1, 1782.”

⁷⁷ Wells, *History of Newbury, VT*, 102.

introduction to General Washington. Meshech Weare, President of New Hampshire's Committee of Safety, and Dr. Nathaniel Peabody, a former New Hampshire delegate to the Continental Congress, agreed to write letters of introduction. Weare concluded that Johnson's "situation at this time is very difficult," but "I have no reason to suspect his honesty or fidelity."⁷⁸ Similarly, Peabody wrote that he had no doubt that Johnson "hath been ungenerously deceived, injured and betrayed by some person... whom he had a just claim to better treatment."⁷⁹ He believed, "without hesitation," that Johnson was "a faithful and sincere friend to the independence of these United States" and that, further, he was "a gentleman on whose declaration your Excellency may place full dependence."



Figure 30: Meshech Weare's home in Hampton Falls, NH. It was probably from this house that Weare wrote a letter of introduction for Thomas Johnson to deliver to General George Washington. Weare was President of the New Hampshire, including its Committee of Safety, from 1776 to 1785. According to the 1973 application to add this home

⁷⁸ "Letter from Mesech Weare to George Washington, November 25, 1782" (Hampton Falls, NH), Johnson Papers DOC 574: 22, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.

⁷⁹ "Letter from Nathaniel Peabody to George Washington, November 27, 1782" (Atkinson, NH), Johnson Papers DOC 574: 22, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.

to the National Register of Historic Places, George Washington visited this house in 1775.⁸⁰ Photo courtesy of “Magicpiano” (2013), published under the GNU Free Documentation License.

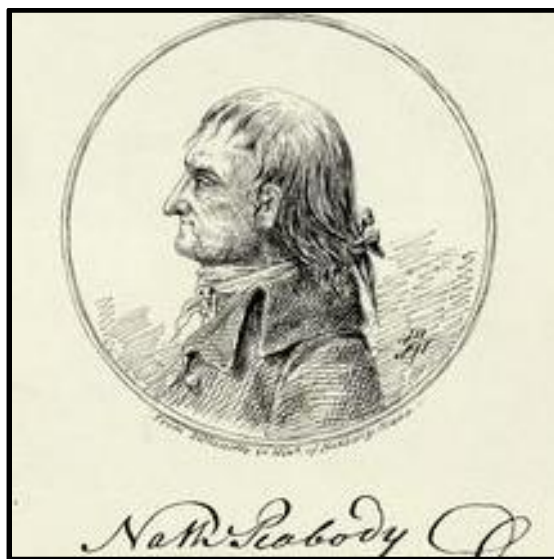
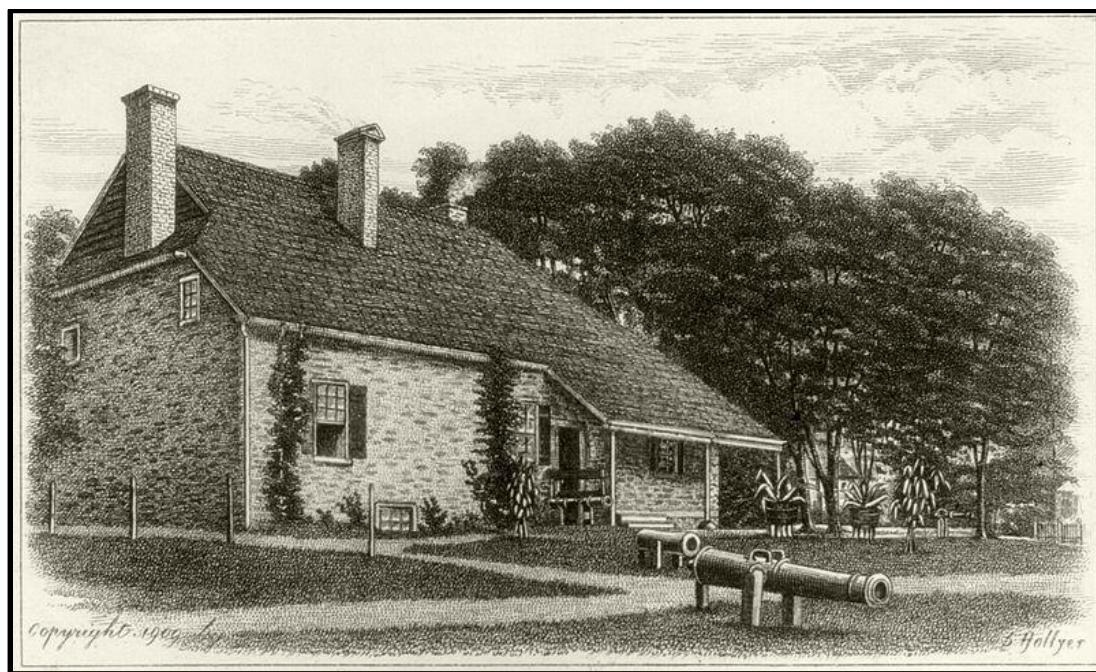


Figure 31: Posthumous depiction of Nathaniel Peabody, a New Hampshire Delegate to the Continental Congress 1779-1780 and delegate to the New Hampshire state legislature in 1782. On November 27, 1782 Peabody wrote a letter of introduction for Thomas Johnson to meet with George Washington, in which he put full confidence in Johnson's loyalty to the United States. Image created by David McNeely c.1880. Image courtesy of New York Public Library's Digital Gallery.



⁸⁰ “National Register of Historic Places Inventory - Nomination Form: Governor Meshech Weare House,” June 29, 1973, <http://pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/NRHP/Text/73000174.pdf>.

Figure 32: General George Washington's Headquarters in Newburgh, New York. The Continental Army encamped in Newburgh from April 1782 to August 1783. It was from this location that Washington declared peace. Before peace was officially established, though, Thomas Johnson visited Washington at this location to request a relief from his troubles in Newbury. He hoped Washington could endorse his loyalty to the rebel cause and end suspicions against him at home. Image courtesy of the United States Library of Congress. Artist unknown. (1909)

Johnson reached Washington's encampment on December 4, 1782. His visit was short, and he returned home, two hundred forty miles northeast of Newburgh, just eight days later.⁸¹ It was also fruitless. Washington denied Johnson's exchange probably for the same reasons he denied an exchange in June, which included the initiation of peace negotiations between the United States and Great Britain. Perhaps also included in Washington's reasons were Washington's distrust of Vermont's loyalty to the republic or the tenuous authority of Johnson's military status since the United States did not recognize the state of Vermont. Downcast and dejected, Johnson returned home.

Not long after Johnson returned to Newbury, he received something of a peace offering from General Jacob Bayley. Bayley sent a messenger to warn Johnson of all the evidence gathered against him in Canada. A few days later, Johnson's brother-in-law Dudley Carleton was warned by Er Chamberlain to look out for Johnson because the British no longer trusted him. At this point, Johnson took the initiative to gather as much information about his situation as he could. He had Er Chamberlain and Abel Davis write written testimonies about the Bayley conspiracy and their involvement in it. Johnson also interviewed Dudley Carleton and John McClane and acquired a confession from Joseph Page.

⁸¹ Wells, *History of Newbury, VT*, 103.

How Johnson intended to use this information is unknown. Almost as soon as it was gathered it became moot, for the Bayley conspiracy ended when James Bayley returned home early in 1783. The exact date of James' return is not recorded, but it must have occurred between January 4th and March 5th because an account of the Bayley conspiracy written by Johnson on January 4, 1783 does not mention James' return, but in an account written on March 5, 1783, Johnson wrote that the British wanted him to send "an account how James Bayley behaved Since he Came home."⁸² With James home, the Bayleys' strongest incentive to denounce Johnson was removed.

The end of the Bayley conspiracy did not mean the end of the threats and danger for Johnson based on suspicions regarding his loyalties. In Canada, some still suspected Johnson of being a rebel. In February 1783, Johnson's letter was "Flung on The ground and Not Read," while Davis, its messenger, and his son, were imprisoned for nineteen days.⁸³ Eventually General Haldimand intervened and compensated Davis twenty pounds for the inconvenience. Haldimand may have still held faith in Johnson's information, but whoever detained Davis did not. Further, Johnson's patriotism to the United States was suspected by many. Sometime between June 1782 and February 1783 some of Johnson's letters to Canada were intercepted and made known to the public.⁸⁴ Even though he had the trust of prominent men like Dr. Nathaniel Peabody and Mesech Weare, and if not trust than at least permission from General George Washington to give intelligence to the

⁸² "Thomas Johnson's Account of Events March 5, 1783," Johnson Papers DOC 574:42, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Wells, *History of Newbury, VT*, 102.

British, Johnson's loyalty to the rebellion was kept secret to preserve his role with Haldimand. The publicity of Johnson's correspondence with the British seemed to many as damning evidence of his treason. Despite the withdrawal of his most formidable foes, Johnson still found himself "Distressed on Evry Side."⁸⁵

Johnson was saved from any further prosecution only by the official end of the war. Peace negotiations began in April 1782, a few months before the attempted capture of General Jacob Bayley, and the Treaty of Paris was drafted November 30, 1782, while Johnson fled Newbury for Newburgh in an attempt to obtain security from General Washington. The treaty was not signed, however, until September 1783, months after Johnson's letter was flung on the floor in Canada, and was not ratified by the Continental Congress until January 14, 1784. When the war ended, neither Johnson nor the other residents of Newbury received any closure for the confusion, betrayals, and questions that arose from the civil war on their borderland location.

Johnson's double-agency, the Bayleys' conspiracy, the defections of Abner Barlow and John Gibson, and the Corinth residents' oaths of loyalty are some of the examples that show how fluid were people's identities between rebels and loyalists during the American War of Independence. All of these people found themselves caught between sides in a civil war and compromised their ideology in order to better the chances of their and their loved ones' survival. Their stories show that a variety of circumstances exposed the tenuousness of the American patriotic identity, and that a variety of responses to that exposure were accepted as part of the patriot identity.

⁸⁵ "Letter from Thomas Johnson to British in Canada, C. November 1782."

POSTLUDE

Thomas Johnson: Memorialized

“I observed an anonymous publication in your paper of April 6th, some part of which from the particular allusions it contained, however inapplicable, I have a right to presume were intended for me – As your columns have been the mean of disseminating personal slander. I hope they will be equally open for the refutation of it.”

-Thomas Johnson¹

Despite remaining a prominent and wealthy citizen, and being elected a Town Representative on ten separate occasions, Thomas Johnson faced criticism of his Revolutionary War activities until his death in 1819. In an undated letter written presumably later in life Johnson defended his actions during the war against anonymous accusations probably published in a newspaper. The publication that prompted Johnson’s reply is unknown, but Johnson’s response can tell us a little about the criticism against him.² Johnson claimed that “While Washington was so glorious by contending in the field, I was in a less conspicuous situation esciting myself to support him & my country.”

¹ Thomas Johnson, “My Defense of Toryism” n.d., Johnson Papers DOC 574: 71.2, Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library. The title of this document comes from the archive in which it was held, not from the document itself nor the author.

² Johnson’s letter of defense was undated and not addressed to a recipient, but it is clear it was in reply to a publication that appeared on an April 6th. In Wells’ *History of Newbury* the letter is mentioned as a quick reference for a description of the weather conditions Johnson faced while blazing the Bayley-Hazen Road. The letter is not analyzed itself, but it was claimed to be intended for the *Spooner’s Vermont Journal*. Even without Well’s footnote, *Spooner’s* seems the likeliest intended recipient as it was the closest large newspaper in the area. (It was published in Windsor, VT, about fifty miles south of Newbury). Thanks to the database of America’s Historic Newspapers, (<http://www.readex.com/content/americas-historical-newspapers>), one can search *Spooner’s* and hundreds of other early US newspapers. The original publication that provoked Johnson’s defense remains elusive, though. *Spooner’s* started publication in 1783, and there were seven years in which a newspaper was printed on April 6th between then and Johnson’s death. No article was found in any of those issues that seemed to be the article to which Johnson is responding. I also looked in all issues that were published on an April 5th & 7th. It is still a mystery as to

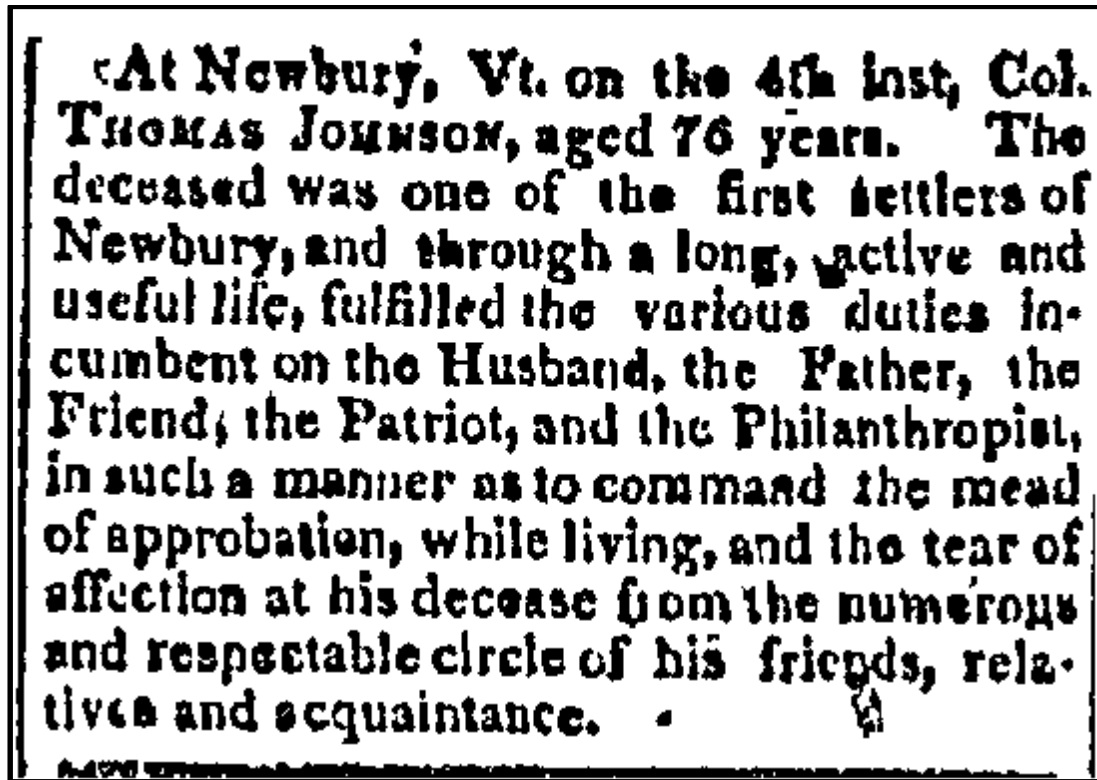


Figure 33: Thomas Johnson's obituary in the Vermont Intelligencer. It esteemed Johnson as a "Patriot" with a "numerous and respectable circle" of friends. It did not mention suspicions of treason to his country, but instead shows that Johnson remained a prominent citizen of Newbury. Published on January 18, 1819 in Bellows Falls, VT. Image courtesy of America's Historical Newspapers.

The accusations must have also cast suspicion on Johnson's rise in wealth during the war, for Johnson goes on to claim that he never accepted any pay from the British, but instead "sacrificed at least three thousand dollars in maintain the cause of my country," the United States. Johnson concluded by citing the highest authority in his defense: "a letter from Gen Washington expression of his thanks for my services."

who wrote the accusations, who published them, and exactly what they were. Another interpretation has been suggested to me by Dr. Dona Brown of the University of Vermont. Brown has pointed out that accusations given in the US's early federal period of Toryism during the Revolutionary War, especially accusations that revolved around finances, often cloaked Democratic-Republicans' criticisms of Federalists. How Democratic-Republican and Federalist relations shaped the early memory of the American Revolution, and how that may have affected Johnson, is an interesting topic that would require further study.

Unlike Johnson, there is no record that General Bayley faced criticism for collaborating with the British. His contemporaries might have found his actions suspicious or distasteful, but if they did then their interpretations were ignored in early histories and have since been lost. In historical depictions of all varieties, Bayley is unquestionably a patriot.

Local histories have depicted Johnson and Bayley as virtuous founding fathers and unwavering patriot heroes. In Wells' *History of Newbury*, which has been the foundation of much of the local knowledge of early Newbury and of Thomas Johnson, Johnson's double-agency is acknowledged but defended as something that was done for the patriot cause and with George Washington's approval. The suspicions that Johnson faced during and after the war are also mentioned, but they are downplayed. Johnson's biggest challenge, the Bayley conspiracy, is not mentioned, which not only downplays the challenges to Johnson's patriot identity, but also leaves Bayley's memory untarnished.

From reading Wells' local history, one would never know that Bayley, the acknowledged founding hero of the town, conspired with the British. This may be in part because the Bayley and Johnson families married just after the war when Betsy Johnson married Isaac Bayley in 1788.³ It may also be contributed to the lasting influence of both families over the town, both financially and politically. In a 1902 genealogical publication of Newbury residents, the Bayley and Johnson families took up a cumulative

³ Wells, *History of Newbury, VT*, 447.

thirty-two pages, a significantly greater number than their neighbors.⁴ By sheer numbers, wealth, and influence, they likely served as unofficial gatekeepers of their public memory for many years. In other words, the gentlemen identity of Johnson, passed down in degrees to his descendants, has guarded his identity as a patriot.

One of their descendants who contributed to the local knowledge of Johnson's history was the distinguished author Frances Parkinson Keyes. Keyes was a descendant of Thomas Johnson and as an adult she inherited his 1775 home in Newbury.⁵ In 1920, she wrote an article about her most accomplished ancestor for a local history magazine.⁶ In it, Keyes defended Johnson's relationship with the British during the war as an action taken to further the rebels' goals. She repeated Johnson's claim that he intended only to get access to enough information to know the true danger to Vermont, and to provide evidence against the traitors who genuinely conspired with the British. As for Bayley, she didn't even bother defending him; his collaboration with the British was unmentioned.

Keyes went further in honoring Johnson than by just this one article, though. She memorialized him in one of her many novels. *The Safe Bridge* was set in Newbury, VT just after the end of the American Revolution. In it, the young heroine meets Thomas Johnson, who is described as a merry old man who is generous with gifts and laughter,

⁴ The genealogical record of Newbury residents in 1902 is printed as an appendix of: *Ibid.*, 417–743.

⁵ Joy L. Michelson, "Jacob Bayley, Indians, and the Remembered Past: Reflections on History I a Small Vermont Town" (Dartmouth College, 2010), 29.

⁶ Frances P. Keyes, "The Story of Colonel Thomas Johnson," *The Granite Monthly: New Hampshire State Magazine* 2 (1920): 316–24, 355–67.



*Figure 34: Frances Parkinson Keyes, famous early twentieth-century novelist and descendant of Thomas Johnson. Her 1934 novel, *Safe Bridge*, was set in early federalist Newbury, VT. In the novel, Johnson is described as an ardent patriot and a well-respected member of the community. Photo courtesy of the United States Library of Congress. (1921)*

one who stamped around “with great gusto” and shouted and chuckled at the same time.⁷ His status is acknowledged as “a great man,” a founder and early settler of the town, and he is usually referred to as “the Colonel.” Not only are the suspicions of Johnson’s treason never mentioned, but Johnson reprimands his wife for keeping company with those who were known loyalists during the war. The reputation of General Bayley once again remains untarnished, and Bayley and Johnson are romantically described in this novel as “two old friends.”

This selective memory is not limited to local histories and fictional depictions written a hundred years ago. Academically trained historians who have researched Bayley and Johnson, often using the same boxes of primary documents as have I, have failed to mention the Bayley conspiracy.⁸ Their stories always end after the attempted capture of Bayley – Johnson warned his friend, Bayley escaped, and Bayley was grateful to Johnson after. They ignore all of the secrecy and backstabbing in the fallout. There are many likely reasons for this. First, because no previous historian continued the story past that point, there are no indicators from secondary sources that there is any more to the story (although primary sources in the Johnson collection make obvious that the intrigue and secrecies continued well past June 1782). Second, the documents are difficult to understand because of the secrecy involved. Many are unsigned, unaddressed, undated,

⁷ Frances Parkinson Keyes, *The Safe Bridge* (New York, NY: Julian Messner, Inc., 1934), 13, 61, 96, 111, 126.

⁸ Historians who discuss the Haldimand Negotiations and Jacob Bayley but have overlooked the Bayley conspiracy include: Sherman, Sessions, and Potash, *Freedom and Unity*; Bennett, *A Few Lawless Vagabonds*; Mathews, *Frontier Spies*; Watt, *A Dirty, Trifling Piece of Business*; Watt, *I Am Heartily Ashamed*; Bayley, “An Address Commemorative of Jacob Bayley”; Wells, *History of Newbury, VT*; Powers, *Historical Sketches of the Coos Country*.

and some are contradictory. Because of the nature of the conspiracy, people lied. Trying to figure out not only who all the characters involved were, but their roles and relationships that might give insight into whether they're telling the truth to that particular source is not dissimilar from detective work. If the historians before me came across the same letters as I did that tell of the Bayley conspiracy, it would be easy to dismiss them from lack of clarity.

Last, and probably most influential, is that the documents on the Bayley conspiracy contradict commonplace pre-conceived notions about the nature of loyalty during the American Revolution being clear-cut. Instead, the identity of the new nation was still being formed during the war, as were the identities of those who supported it. Because of this state of construction, loyalties were in constant flux. There was no clearly delineated conflict between freedom-loving Americans and their British oppressors; instead there was a civil war, a domestic insurgency, and a state of confusion and malleability. It was a time when men like Johnson and Bayley could collaborate as they did with the British and still identify with the rebellion. Not understanding this state of flux has led to the uniform and shallow portrayal of Bayley as an unwavering patriot. Instead, I would like to suggest that patriotism included wavering at the time. It is not necessary to dismiss the Bayley conspiracy to conclude that Bayley was a patriot.

Unlike Bayley, Johnson has been ignored by all American historical writings other than the local histories done by Powers and Wells in 1846 and 1902, respectively.⁹

⁹ In addition to the local histories by Peter Powers and Frederic Wells, there is only one other work by an American historian that mentions Thomas Johnson: David Alan Donath, "Jacob Bayley Ascendant : Settlement, Speculation, Politics, and Revolution in the Upper Connecticut Valley" (University of Vermont, 1978), Special Collections, Bailey-Howe Library, University of Vermont. Donath's research,

His collaboration with the British was more conspicuous and probably more widely known than Bayley's, so perhaps it is harder to mold him into simplistic narratives of American heroism. American historians have largely ignored Johnson as a main figure, opting instead to focus on more well-known statesmen and military leaders, and on people who were in more militarily strategic locations in the early 1780s.

Canadian historians tend to give Johnson more emphasis.¹⁰ The story of Johnson's capture, parole, role in supplying provisions and information to the British, the warning he gave Bayley in June of 1782, and some of the suspicions against him in late 1782-1783 are written by them in more detail. However, the Canadian historians still provide a verdict as to Johnson's ultimate loyalty and use that to explain how his actions were consistent and coherent. In Gavin Watt's two volume chronicle of the war as waged from Canada in the 1780s, Johnson is included in the "cast of characters" given before the introductory chapter, listed under the patriots. Hazel C. Mathews, on the other hand, claimed that after Johnson was captured in 1781, he changed his loyalty to the British for good. Whether loyal to the United States or loyal to the king, Johnson has been placed on one side or the other as if there was no overlap or vacillation.

which was done as a UVM Master's thesis, mentions Johnson only twice and never with any significant analysis. The first mention describes Johnson as Captain of the militia in 1775 and as "a neighbor of Bayley's." (p.100) The second mention is for Johnson's employment by Bayley to blaze a path for the Bayley-Hazen Road. (p.106)

¹⁰ The Canadian historians who include Thomas Johnson in the story of the Haldimand Negotiations include: Mathews, *Frontier Spies*, 112; Watt, *A Dirty, Trifling Piece of Business*; Watt, *I Am Heartily Ashamed*. Unfortunately, the most recent book, David Bennett's 2014 monograph on the Haldimand Negotiations entitled *A Few Lawless Vagabonds*, follows the trend of the Americans, and eliminates any mention of Johnson in favor of assigning more agency to the Allen brothers and Governor Chittenden.

I am not suggesting that Johnson was merely a fence-sitter, or that he was looking out only for himself and did not care which side won the war. Like most historians, I place Johnson on the side of the patriots, but I do so for different reasons. Since the identity of a patriot was being constructed at the time, there was no set mold or exact definition for what that meant, only a general understanding. Because of his service in the militia, in battles against the British near Ticonderoga, his identification as a patriot by his British captors, and his continued service to Washington in the form of information after being given his parole, Johnson fit within this vague understanding. Of course, his collaboration with the British means that he also fit within the vague understanding of a loyalist, at least after 1781, or a man with only his self-interests in mind. However, these loyalist-leanings do not outweigh his service to the patriots, which continued even after his service to the British began. Johnson was a patriot not because all of his actions were for that cause, but because most of them were. Just as his contemporaries did, I believe that identifying America's founding generation should be done with flexibility and forgiveness. Thomas Johnson's story cannot be understood without looking at the multiple layers of his identity, including his social, state, and national identities. And those identities cannot be understood without understanding that since they were being created and changed during Johnson's lifetime, they were in constant flux.

Public commemorations of Johnson and Bayley have furthered the view of the pair as virtuous and steadfast patriots. Colonel Thomas Johnson was honored by the Daughters of the American Revolution with a plaque that highlighted his role in

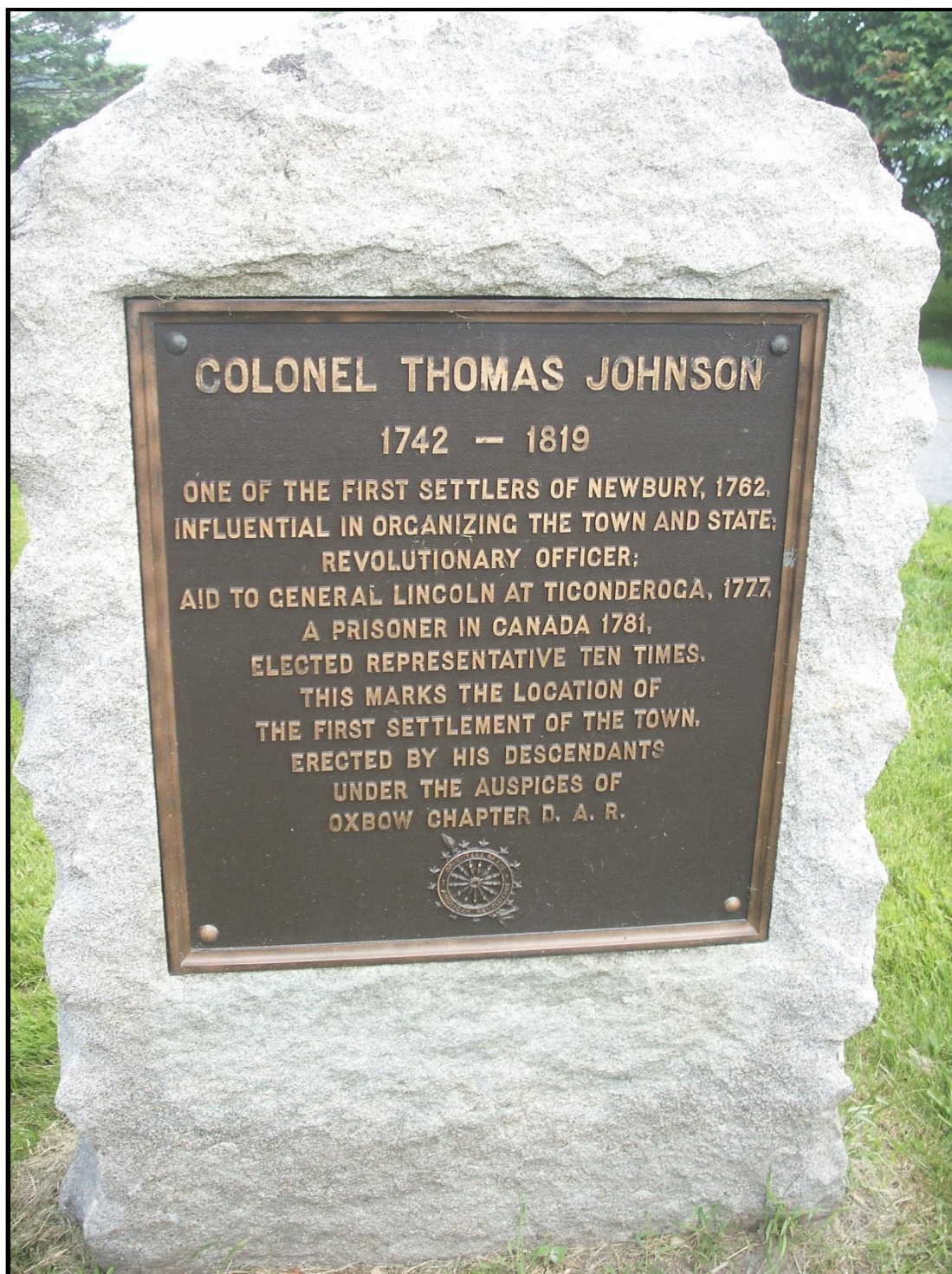


Figure 35: Historic plaque for Thomas Johnson erected by the Daughters of the American Revolution. This is located off of Rt. 5 in Newbury, VT near the Oxbow and Johnsons' 1775 home. Photo taken by author. (June 2014)

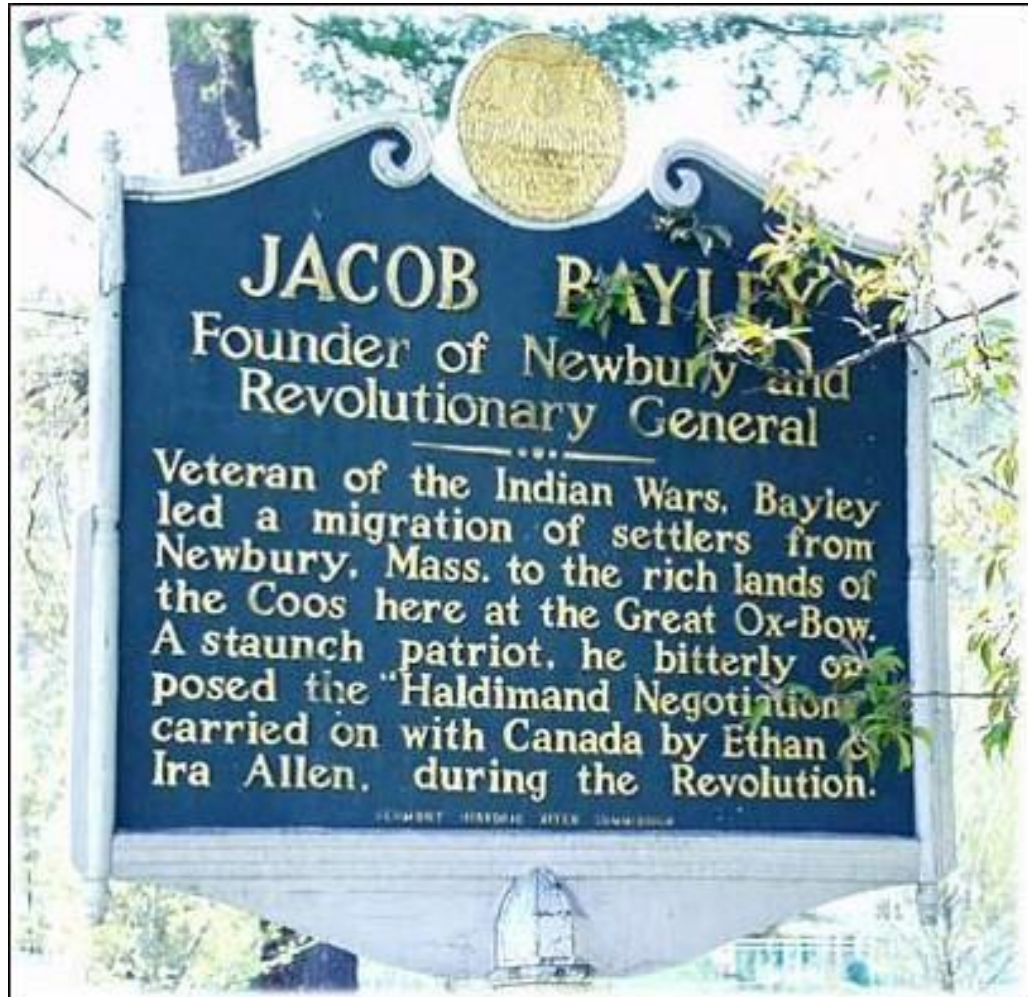


Figure 36: Historic marker for General Jacob Bayley, put up by the state of Vermont. It is located on Min Street in downtown Newbury, VT. Photo taken by author. (June 2014)

organizing the town, serving under General Lincoln at Ticonderoga, and as a town representative. It mentions his capture in 1781, but fails to include his involvement in the Haldimand Negotiations, his support of British scouts, or the suspicions he faced the rest of his life as to his loyalty to the United States. In a roadside historic marker in Newbury's town center, the state of Vermont distinguished General Jacob Bayley as a veteran of the French and Indian War and founder of the town. Further, Bayley is commended for opposing the Haldimand Negotiations, posing another reason that a plaque honoring Johnson could not admit Johnson's participation in those affairs without complicating Johnson's loyalty. Not surprisingly, there is no suggestion that Bayley was willing to backstab his friend in order to retrieve his son.

It is these plaques, supplemented by verbal stories passed down the generations, that inform most who know of Thomas Johnson's existence. For the sake of honoring the past, the truth has been shrouded with a cloak of dignity and veneration. In the beginning stages of my research I became friends with Skyler Bailey, a descendant of Jacob Bayley who claimed to have grown up hearing "somewhat incorrect versions of all of these stories" from his grandfather.¹¹ "In my family," Bailey explained, "it is normal to grow up hearing stories of Jacob Bayley and Thomas Johnson, and Johnson is of course thought of very highly amongst the Bailey's." A man whom the Bayley sons hated and was chosen as victim to save themselves is thought of very highly amongst Bayleys descendants? Given the way history has been portrayed, "of course."

¹¹ Email: Skyler Bailey to Angela Grove, "Haldimand/Thomas Johnson," March 11, 2014.

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